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KAMIKAKUSHI NO MONOGATARI

1

STORY BY: GAKUTO CODA ART BY: REI MUTSUKI

TOKYOPOP®

Missing 神隠しの物語 1

原作 甲田学人

作画 睦月れい

デザイン○荻窪裕司

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Story by Gakuto Coda
Art by Rei Mutsuki

TOKYOPOP

HAMBURG // LONDON // LOS ANGELES // TOKYO

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Cherry Blossoms 5
Chapter 2. His Majesty, the Prince of Darkness 43
Chapter 3. Waking Nightmares 79
Chapter 4. The Hidden World 123

Missing
神隠しの物語

IT WILL BEGIN, WON'T IT?
OF SADNESS BEYOND HUMAN UNDER-STANDING
SOON...
...THE WIND MAIDEN SINGS...
..LONGING FOR THE SCENT OF HUMANS...
FLIRTING WITH THE SCENT OF FLOWERS...
...NO HUMAN CAN TOUCH.
IT SINGS, WEARING SHACKLES THAT...
...WHICH CARRIES THE SCENT OF PEOPLE.
A CREATURE DANCES, DRESSED IN THE WIND...

Chapter 1
Cherry Blossoms

IT WILL BEGIN SOON...

bing-

bong.

SEISOU GRADUATE ACADEMY AUXILIARY HIGH SCHOOL

WAIT UP, TAKEMI-KUN!

HEY!

OH, HEY RYOKO

Takemi Kondou
Junior, Literature Club member

ARE YOU GOING TO THE CLUBROOM? WANT TO WALK ME THERE?

UMM... SURE.

WHO'S THIS, TAKEMI? YOUR GIRLFRIEND?

HUH?!

G-GIRL-FRIEND

NO NO NO! NOTHING LIKE THAT! WE'RE JUST IN THE SAME CLUB, THAT'S ALL!

Ryoko Kusakabe
Junior, Literature Club member

I THINK YOU JUST GOT DUMPED, KONDOU-KUN!

YOU POOR WIDDLE THING!

LOOK, THERE'S NOTHING GOING ON, ALL RIGHT?!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DENY IT SO VEHEMENTLY

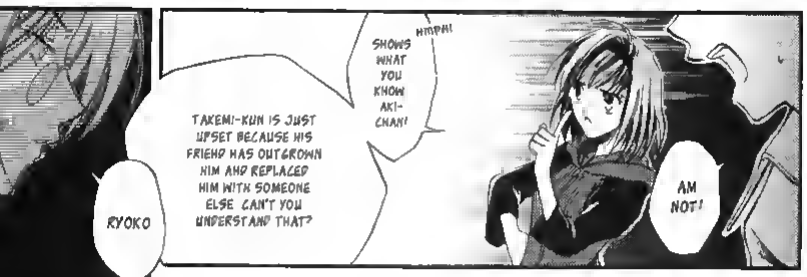
takemi, you dummy

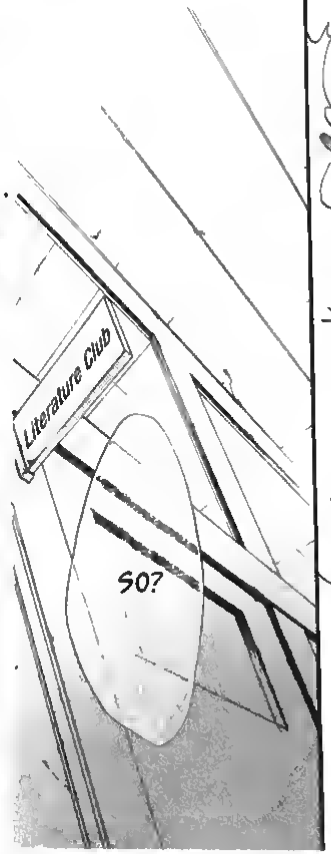
HE'S A JERK. A JERK IN LOVE. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO ABOUT IT?
Toshiya Murakami
Junior, Literature Club member

YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS! NO ONE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD GO OUT WITH YOU!
Aki Kidono
Junior, Literature Club member

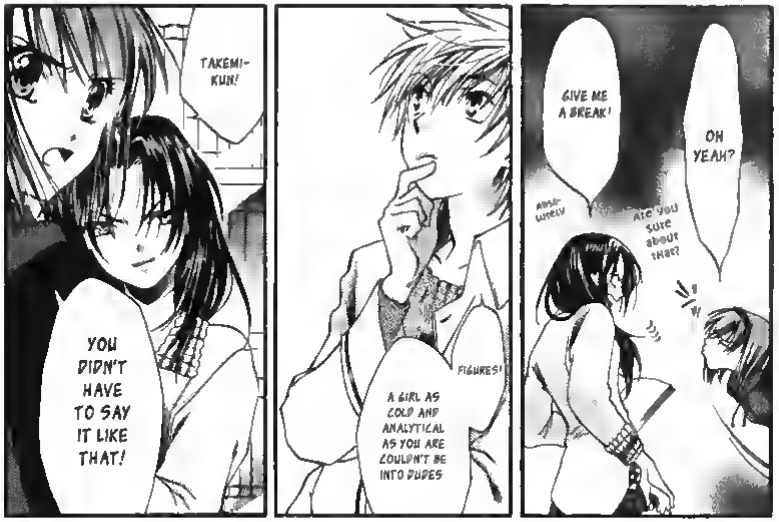
SHH!
WE'RE TRYING TO READ OVER HERE!

YOU DON'T GET IT! WHEREVER WE ARE, IN THE DORMS OR IN CLASS... ALL HE DOES IS DRONE ON AND ON ABOUT HIS GIRLFRIEND... I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE HE'S DATING SOME SUPER-MODEL OR SOMETHING!
IF HE TALKS ABOUT HER HALF AS MUCH AS YOU TALK ABOUT HIM...
YOU HAVE MY SYMPATHY


RYOKO
TAKEMI-KUN IS JUST UPSET BECAUSE HIS FRIEND HAS OUTGROWN HIM AND REPLACED HIM WITH SOMEONE ELSE. CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?
HMPH! SHOWS WHAT YOU KNOW AKI-CHAN!
AM NOT!


Literature Club
SO?

HEY! WHERE'D THAT LITTLE PUNK GO? I WASN'T DONE WITH MY STORY!!
LIKE JUST YESTERDAY, WE WERE ON THE PHONE FOR LIKE, EVER--OH WAIT. YOU TWO ARE IN THE SAME HOMEROOM, SO SHE PROBABLY TOLD YOU ALL ABOUT IT!
SO WE WERE LIKE TOTALLY GOING ON AND ON AND ON ABOUT THIS MUNCH PAINTING
MAN! IT'S SO AWESOME WHEN YOU GOT A GIRLFRIEND WITH THE SAME INTERESTS AS YOU!
vanish
POOR BROKEN HEARTED TAKEMI-KUN!
AWW! I'M SORRY FOR MAKING FUN OF YOU SINCE EVERY DAY IS SUCH A LOVE FEST FOR NANAMI-SAN AND I, SOMETIMES I FORGET WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE SINGLE! HEE HEE!
JERK! LET'S GO, RYOKO
DON'T YOU EVEN WANT TO SAY GOODBYE?
NAH SCREW 'IM


TAKEMI-KUN!
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY IT LIKE THAT!
A GIRL AS COLD AND ANALYTICAL AS YOU ARE COULDN'T BE INTO DUDES
FIGURES!
GIVE ME A BREAK!
OH YEAH?
Are you sure about that?

UH...
YOUR MAJESTY?
EDITOR TO CHIBICHU!
KIDONO'S A LITTLE LIKE HIS MAJESTY, YA KNOW? ABOVE THE CONCERNS OF US MERE MORTALS
I mean
I WAS TRYING TO SAY THAT...
YEAH!
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, YOUR ROYAL SPOOKINESS? DO YOU HAVE ANY INTEREST IN AFFAIRS OF THE HEART?
YIKES!

THANKS A LOT
Did I make things worse?
HUH?!
WAY TO SHRED WHAT LITTLE DIGNITY TAKEMI-KUN HAS LEFT

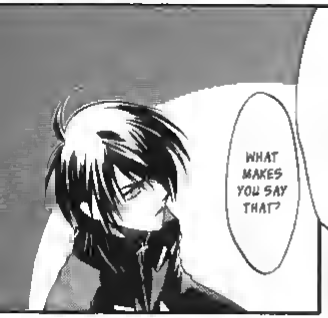
SO... UM... WHO DO YOU LIKE, AKI-CHAN?
Change the subject Change the subject
OH great! now she's IGNORING me
I DIDN'T MEAN
open mouth insert foot.

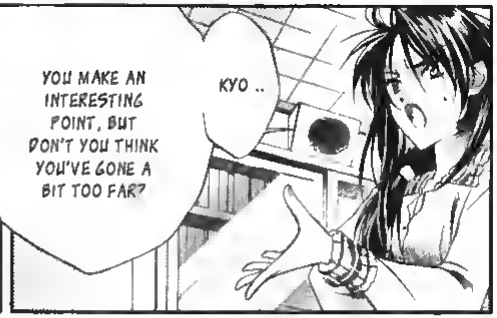
NOPE NO ONE
THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMEONE WHO'S ON YOUR MIND! WHO IS IT?

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS IDEA OF "LOVE" THAT HAS YOU ALL SO WOUND UP?
LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING
NOT EVEN A LITTLE?
Mmm
NOT IN THE SLIGHTEST.
"WOUND UP"?
IT JUST FEELS GOOD TO BE WITH SOMEONE YOU LIKE.
NOT ONLY THAT, BUT DOING THINGS, OR WANTING TO DO THINGS FOR THAT PERSON FEELS GOOD, TOO!
I'M SURE YOU'VE FELT THAT WAY ABOUT SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE AT LEAST ONCE, YOUR MAJESTY.
Then again, maybe not.
Kyoichi
Junior, Literature Club member

WOULD BE TO VOW NEVER TO TRY TO POSSESS THE OTHER PERSON
THE ONLY WAY THAT THE IDEAL (OF) LOVE WOULD HAVE A TRULY SPECIAL VALUE
IN OTHER WORDS
...THE ONLY TRUE LOVE IS PLATONIC...

LIKEWISE, WANTING TO DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE, THAT'S JUST ANOTHER SELF-SERVING IMPULSE.
!!
AFTER ALL, YOU'RE ONLY DOING WHAT YOU BELIEVE THEY WANT, NOT WHAT YOU KNOW THEY WANT


WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?


YOU MAKE AN INTERESTING POINT, BUT DON'T YOU THINK YOU'VE GONE A BIT TOO FAR?
KYO ..

AN ILLUSION ...?
INDUBITABLY LOVE IS CLEARLY NOTHING MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF MANKIND'S DRIVE TO POSSESS THINGS

EXCEPT, FOR SOME REASON, JUST BECAUSE THE "THING" WE'RE COVETING IS A PERSON, WE PUT THE IDEA ON A PEDESTAL AND GLORIFY IT THOUGH IN THE END .
LOVE IS SIMPLY GREED

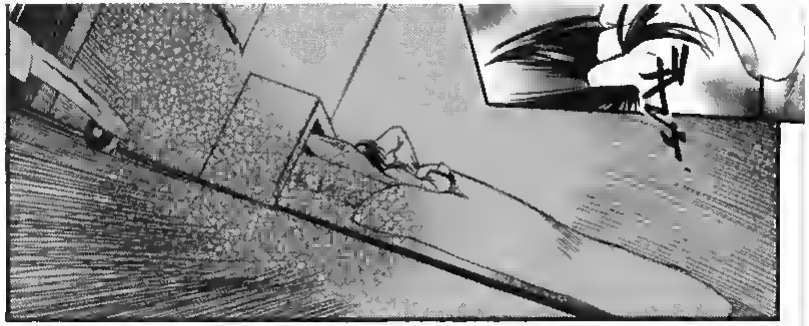
THOSE FEELINGS YOU CALL "LOVE" ARE NOTHING BUT AN ILLUSION

DON'T YOU SEE THAT LOVE MORALS, RELIGION AND ANYTHING ELSE THAT SOCIETY DEEMS TO HAVE SPIRITUAL VALUE ARE ALL COMPLETELY MADE UP? AND WHEN SOCIETY BEGINS TO ACCEPT AND THEN PROJECT THESE VALUES UPON OUR NATURAL DESIRES, INVARIABLY OTHER THINGS WITH LESSER VALUE GET ATTACHED, TOO SO WHAT YOU END UP WITH WHEN YOU SAY THE WORD "LOVE" IS SOMETHING SO WARPED AND VULGAR THAT IT'S POISONOUS TO OUR VERY SOULS. DON'T YOU SEE THAT ONCE WE START TO HARBOR MONOPOLISTIC TENDENCIES TOWARDS OBJECTS OR EVEN PEOPLE, WE'RE JUST SETTING THE STAGE FOR COERCION AND VIOLENCE TO PRESERVE WHAT WE DEEM TO BE OUR "RIGHTS" TO THOSE OBJECTS AND/OR PEOPLE? AND THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BRING ABOUT SUCH TURMOIL AND DANGER THAT FOR THE LIFE OF ME I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ALL INSIST ON GLAMORIZING IT. IT'S SOMETHING OF A PROBLEM, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF
LOVE BITES, EH?
HOW CAN HE
..NOT BELIEVE IN LOVE?
FRANKLY, IT PAINS ME TO TRY AND IMAGINE WHAT YOU ALL GET OUT OF IT.
MM-HM
ACTUALLY, I DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND ALL OF THAT, EITHER
TEE HEE!
AND NO MATTER WHAT KYOICHI SAYS! I'M SURE I LOVE YOU CRAZY KIDS!
YEAH! THE KYOICHI URUSUME FAN CLUB WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE KYOICHI URUSUME ON ANOTHER STELLAR PERFORMANCE!
WOW!! THAT WAS AWESOME, BARON VON BLACKHEART! I COULDN'T EVEN FOLLOW HALF OF THAT!
SHUT UP KONDOU! HALF-WIT!
MY TINY LITTLE BRAIN JUST CAN'T PROCESS ALL OF IT!
I MEAN, REALLY
SOMETIMES THE THINGS YOUR MAJESTY SAYS ARE TOO PROFOUND
KONDOU
DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO START THINKING THINGS THROUGH FOR YOURSELF?
OH YEAH
WELL, THERE'S NO DANGER OF THAT.
I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO FOLLOW YOUR MAJESTY'S MENTAL GYMNASTICS, BUT I FILE IT ALL AWAY UP HERE. I REMEMBER EVERYTHING YOU'VE SAID AS CLEAR AS A BELL!
WELL, I GUESS THAT WILL HAVE TO DO
HMM? WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU TWO GOING ON ABOUT?
IT'S A SECRET!

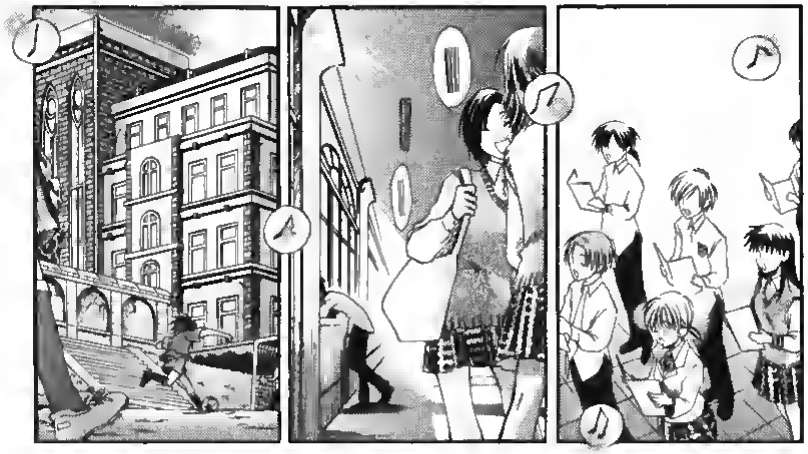
YOU TELL ME.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IT'S GOT ME WONDERING, DID YOU SAY ALL THAT...
...BECAUSE YOU FEEL THAT WAY ABOUT SOMEONE?
WHUZZAT SUPPOSED TA MEAN?!
klak
HE SURE CAN
klak
YOU CAN FESS UP IN THE CAFETERIA, KONDOU
AW
UTSUMI
THAT'S THE BELL! LET'S BREAK FOR LUNCH
MURAKAMI-KUN...?
...WAS SO COMPLETELY AND TOTALLY YOU
THAT SPEECH OF YOURS JUST NOW...
RYO, WE'RE LEAVING
OH! WAIT FOR ME!

...OF DRIED GRASS AND RUST.
SOMEONE TAKES MY HAND.
THE SCENT...
A FEET DARKNESS.
AND I AM SCARED.

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
JUST A DREAM...
HUFF
HUFF
!!



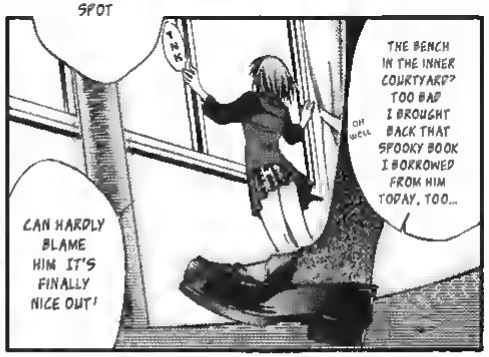
bing
bong



YUP
HUH?
JUST YOU TODAY, MURAKAMI-KUN?

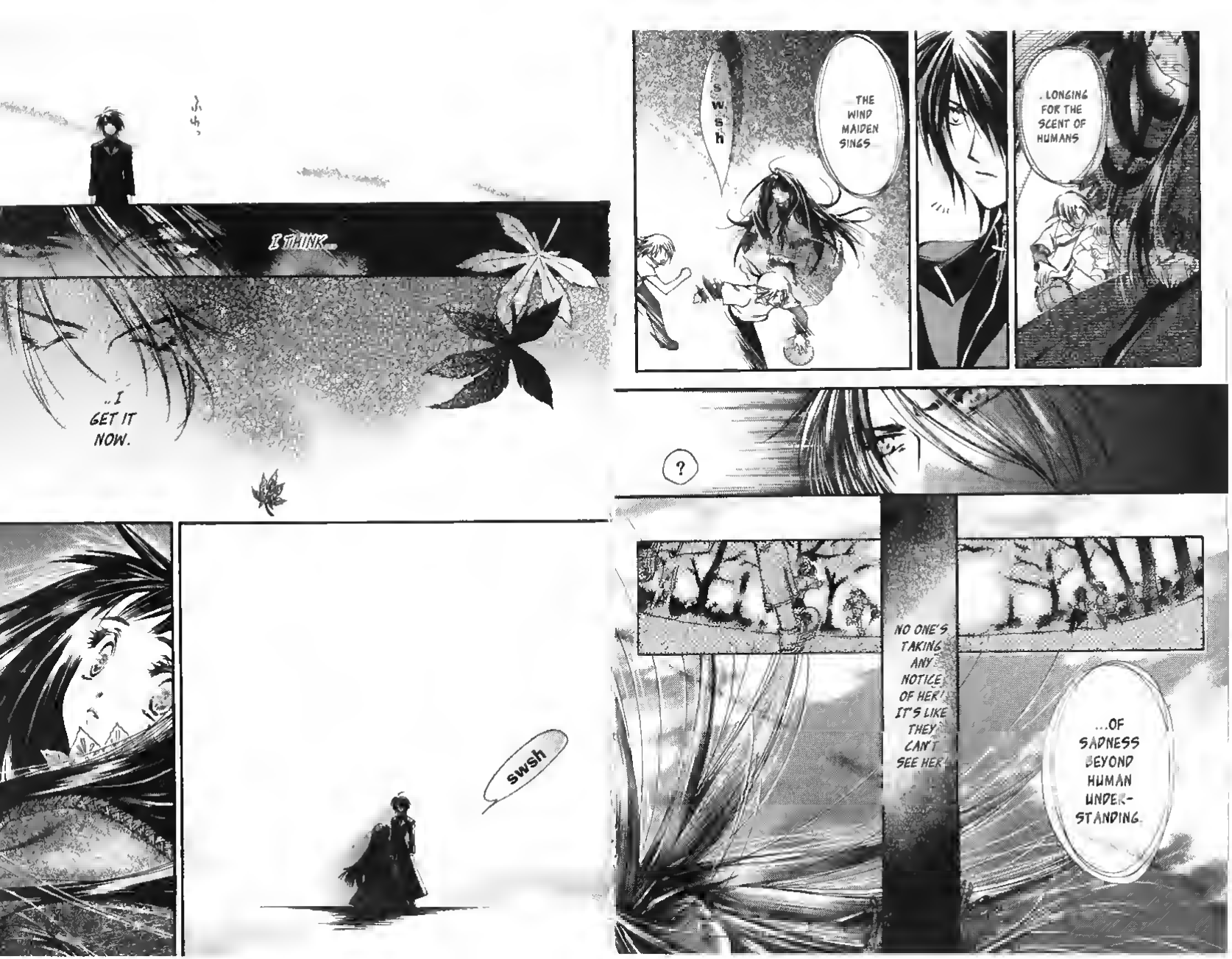
EVEN OUR LITTLE PRINCE OF DARKNESS NEEDS A CATNAP IN THE SUN EVERY NOW AND THEN

WHERE'S EVERYONE ELSE?
WHERE'S KYO?
NAPPING AT HIS USUAL SPOT


I'M HOME
OH WELL
THE BENCH IN THE INNER COURTYARD? TOO BAD I BROUGHT BACK THAT SPOOKY BOOK I BORROWED FROM HIM TODAY, TOO...
CAN HARDLY BLAME HIM IT'S FINALLY NICE OUT!

THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS SMELL SO GOOD! ♡
sniff
THIS...
THAT SCENT... LIKE DRIED GRASS AND RUST...
I REMEMBER THIS SCENT...?
WHERE IS IT COMING FROM?

...NO HUMAN CAN TOUCH
SUCH A FAINT SCENT, LIKE IT COULD DISAPPEAR ANY MOMENT
IT'S COMING FROM
FLIRTING WITH THE SCENT OF FLOWERS
IT SINGS, WEARING SHACKLES THAT .
A CREATURE DANCES, DRESSED IN THE WIND..
WHICH CARRIES THE SCENT OF PEOPLE.
...A SONG?

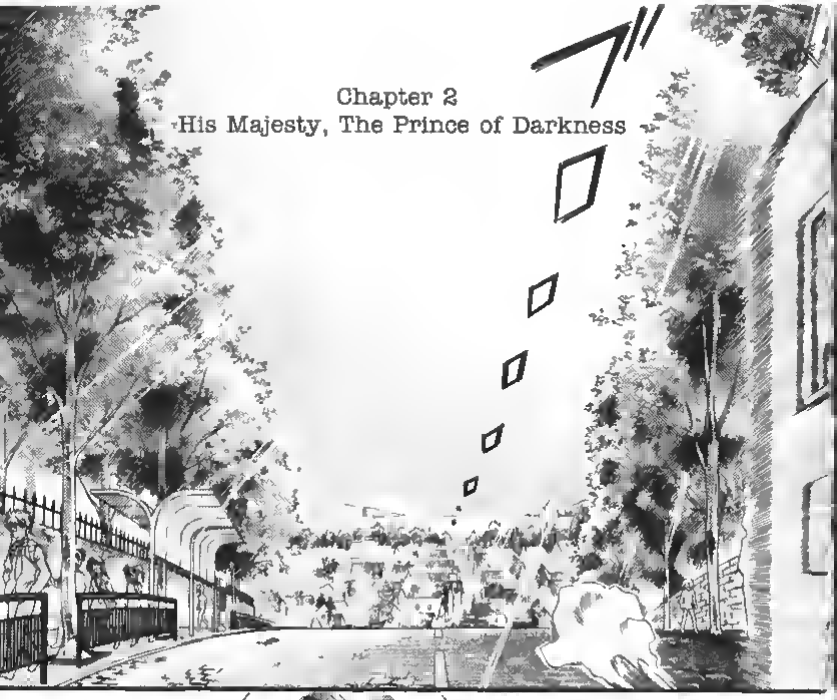

I THINK...
..I GET IT NOW.
swsh
swsh
...THE WIND MAIDEN SINGS
..LONGING FOR THE SCENT OF HUMANS
?
NO ONE'S TAKING ANY NOTICE OF HER! IT'S LIKE THEY CAN'T SEE HER.
...OF SADNESS BEYOND HUMAN UNDER-STANDING.

AND STILL, I HAVE TO ASK YOU.
PLEASE, COME WITH ME?
..WHAT YOU ARE WHAT YOU DO
I KNOW...
PLEASE...
JUST FORGET YOU EVER SAW ME FORGET THAT THIS EVER HAPPENED...
I KNOW WHAT IT WOULD MEAN TO WALK ALONG-SIDE YOU.
YOUR LONELINESS... YOUR SELF-LOATHING
I KNOW MY FATE
..WALK BESIDE ME.
I ACCEPT YOUR CURSE SO, JUST FOR A LITTLE WHILE...
YOU
YOU CAN SEE ME?
I CAN.
YOU MUSTN'T
...YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS WERE...
IF YOU DON'T GO NOW...
SQUEEZE
OR YOU'LL BECOME JUST LIKE ME. YOU SHOULD GO. NOW.
MUSTN'T WHAT?
YOU MUSTN'T GET INVOLVED WITH ME.

I KNOW.
AND STILL, I WANT YOU.
I'M...
I'M NOTHING BUT A MONSTER.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA!
ABOUT WHAT I AM...
ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FALL.
I'M SORRY, BUT YOU COULDN'T POSSIBLY UNDER-STAND
I.

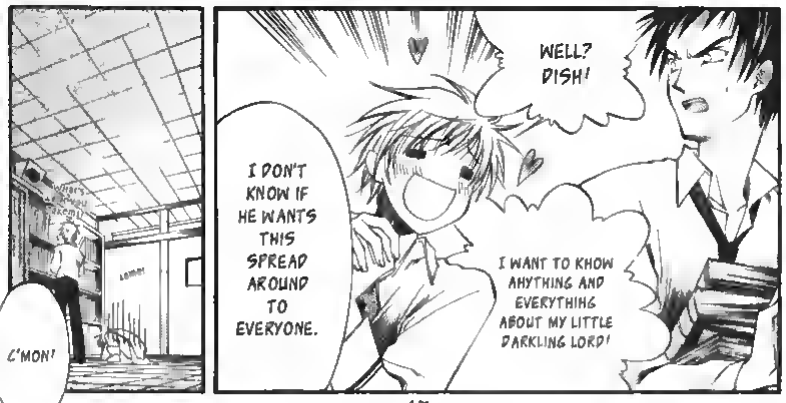
I'M SO SORRY
AND SO OUR BORING, EVERYDAY LIVES..
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!
WHERE'S THEY COME FROM?
WHOA THE...?
THEY WEREN'T THERE A SECOND AGO!
EVERYTHING RETURNED TO NORMAL?
I'M SO...
...SORRY

Chapter 2
His Majesty, The Prince of Darkness



HE PROBABLY TURNED OFF HIS PHONE, JUST SO HE DIDN'T HAVE TO FIELD ANY QUESTIONS
DAMMIT! WHAT A LUCKY BASTARD!
HEY
YOU'RE NOT PULLING MY LEG ARE YOU?
OF COURSE NOT!
AND SHE'S TOTALLY CUTE, TOO!
.....
The number you have dialed is currently unavail-able--
STUPID PHONE!
I WANT TO INTRODUCE YOU TO SOMEONE, KUSAKABE
NO IT'S JUST A BIT OUT OF CHARACTER FOR YOU TO JUST COME UP TO SOMEONE AND SAY HI
TO WHO?
AH?
SORRY DID I SCARE YOU?
OH! YOUR MAJESTY...! GOOD MORNING
?
TO HER.

YOU MEAN THERE REALLY WERE EPISODES?
SAY WHAT?
YEAH, YOU COULD SAY THAT...
I GUESS IF UTSUME WENT AROUND THE BEND, IT WOULDN'T BE A TOTAL SHOCKER.


C'MON!
I DON'T KNOW IF HE WANTS THIS SPREAD AROUND TO EVERYONE.
WELL? DISH!
I WANT TO KNOW ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING ABOUT MY LITTLE DARKLING LORD!

WHOEVER SHE IS, SHE CAN'T BE RIGHT IN THE HEAD
WHY WON'T HE PICK UP HIS PHONE?!
I CAN'T TAKE IT!! SHE'S GOT TO BE A TOTAL BABE IF SHE BROUGHT COUNT GLOOMENSTEIN DOWN TO THE LEVEL OF US MERE MORTALS! I JUST GOTTA SEE HER!

BUT C'MON!
IT'S NOT LIKE HE'S COMPLETELY BONKERS
I DIDN'T SAY THAT
THAT'S HARSH
DON'T YOU THINK, ELLEN?
REALLY? YOU THINK HE'S NOT CRAZY?
AS BRIGHT AS HE MAY BE
KYO IS PRETTY OUT THERE I THINK THE CLINICAL TERM IS "PSYCHOTIC."

YOU MIGHT HAVE A POINT, AKI.
tap
BUT OUR LITTLE PRINCE OF DARKNESS DOES SEEM TO EXPERIENCE REALITY DIFFERENTLY THAN THE REST OF US. HE HAD SOME EPISODES WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER.

SPOOK-TAKULAR?
KUSAKABE CAN'T HELP IT AFTER ALL, SHE SEES "MAGIC" IN EVERYTHING HE DOES
HER HYSTERIA CLOUDS HER VISION
AND YOU'RE BLINDED BY YOUR MISOGYNY!
?
PLAY NICE, YOU TWO! HE WOULDN'T BE OUR DARK PRINCE IF HE DIDN'T LIVE UP TO HIS SPOOK-TAKULAR REPUTATION NOW AND THEN!
AIN'T THAT RIGHT, KIPONO?
HUH?
AKI-CHAN?
REMEMBER LAST YEAR, WHEN HE USED HIS "MAGIC" TO SAVE ME?
I DO! I DO! THAT TIME YOU HAD A PANIC ATTACK, RIGHT?!
THAT WAS TOTALLY AWESOME!
I MEAN... ALL HE DID WAS POINT A FINGER AT YOU AND BLAM-- YOU WERE HEALED!
WHY ARE YOU GUYS SO DOWN ON KYO?
I MEAN, SURE, HE'S KIND OF IN LEFT FIELD. BUT ALL GENIUSES ARE A LITTLE NUTS, RIGHT?
.....
I'M NOT SAYING HE NEEDS TO BE LOCKED UP OR ANYTHING!
SIGH
Eve is out of this world!
It's like she's E.T. or Something!

SINCE WHEN
LONG ENOUGH, THANK YOU.
HE'S...
WHEN I SAY "REFUTATION" I REALLY MEAN, UM
HE'S SCARY!!
He's quiet like a ghost.
YOUR MAJESTY?!!
How long have you been standing there?!
.DID I HAVE A REPUTATION TO LIVE UP TO?
BACK ME UP, GUYS?
THANKS A LOT, GUYS!
They're ignoring me!!
Look it! A little kitty! Meow!
HEY, YOUR MAJESTY I TRIED CALLING YOU A BUNCH OF TIMES JUST NOW, BUT YOUR PHONE SAYS YOU'RE "UNAVAILABLE."
IT WAS WORKING A MINUTE AGO
ARGH...
WELL, I GUESS YOU MUST HAVE BEEN OUT OF RANGE OR SOMETHING
MOST LIKELY
WELL, I WAS CALLING BECAUSE I HAD A QUESTION TO ASK YOU
HEH!
HEH HEH!
?
BWA HA HA HA!

!
WHO TOLD YOU THAT?
NO ONE I MADE IT UP
Fine! Whatever
SO, WHERE IS THIS GIRL OF YOURS ANYHOW? I HEARD YOU GUYS WERE INSEPARABLE!
I WASN'T AWARE THAT POSSESSING A THING HAD ANY RELATION TO ONE'S PRINCIPLES AND POSITION
I HEARD THAT..
...YOU GOT YOURSELF A CHICK! ♡
NOTHING REALLY
SO, WHAT BROUGHT ABOUT THIS CHANGE OF HEART, HUH?
HAHAHA
WAIT!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY ANYTHING! WE ALREADY KNOW!
"THING"?
.....
I'M SORRY, I DON'T QUITE FOLLOW
What circle?
She's your girlfriend. Isn't that the one that forces you to reconsider your little anti-love stance?
THAT'S ALL SHE IS TO YOU?

I'M SO SORRY. URM...!
OH!
DON'T BE SORRY! I'M THE ONE WHO'S SORRY
HMPH
TALK ABOUT AN ODD COUPLE.

WA AAAAAAA!!

I FIGURED KYO WOULD GO FOR A HYPER-INTELLECTUAL, MORE CAPABLE SORT OF GIRL. I'M KIND OF.. ...DISAP-POINTED

WHERE ARE YOUR MANNERS? SHOULDN'T YOU ASK SOMEONE'S NAME WHEN YOU FIRST MEET THEM?!
TAKEMI! YOU IDIOT!

URM. SO, HOW DID YOU TWO HOOK UP?

NUH ?
I'M SO SORRY.
I...

HER NAME IS... AYAME.
AND SHE'S 16 YEARS O...
SHE'S AYAME.
YOUR MAJ-ESTY?
?
IT'S JUST THAT...
...FOR SOME REASON IT JUST DIDN'T SEEM LIKE SHE HAD ONE, YA KNOW?
OH YEAH.
I'M FINE! FINE, I SAY!
I JUST WASN'T THINKING IS ALL
HA HA HA HA
HA HA
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, TAKEMI-KUN?
.....
WHERE ARE MY MANNERS? SO, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
I'M REALLY SORRY ABOUT THAT
I WOULDN'T FEEL RIGHT JUST CALLING YOU BY YOUR FIRST NAME RIGHT OFF THE BAT
WHAT'S YOUR LAST NAME?
ANYWAYS
UHM...
MY LAST NAME?
YEAH
Be nice Aki-chan.
Sorry! I meant eclectic - "unusual."
YOU MEAN SHE'S ONLY A YEAR YOUNGER THAN ME?!
16?
I THOUGHT SHE WAS 13 OR MAYBE...
THAT'S A GRANDMA'S NAME

"KONDOU..."
THAT'S HER SURNAME
YEAH.
KONDOU?
Hey
WE'VE GOT THE SAME LAST NAME
SO
AYAME-CHAN
IS IT?
HUH?
UH, YES!

YOUR MAJESTY?
SORRY! I DIDN'T MEAN
I.

FOUND HER?!
SO, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THE ONLY THING YOU SORT OF KNOW ABOUT HER IS HER NAME?
HOLD UP, KYO
BASICALLY
HOW LONG HAVE YOU TWO KNOWN EACH OTHER, ANYWAYS?
SINCE YESTERDAY.
EH?
OMIGAWD!! DID YOU KIDNAP HER? I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE SO PASSIONATE, YOUR MAJESTY!!
...NO JURY ON EARTH WOULD CONVICT ME
IN A WAY BUT...
A CRIME OF PASSION! HOW ROMANTIC!
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT
...WHERE IS SHE FROM?!
B-
B-
B-
BUT...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
OH
I DON'T KNOW
LIKE WHERE DOES SHE LIVE? WHAT SCHOOL DOES SHE GO TO?
WHAT?!

YES, I AM. BUT, I'M SO SORRY...
ARE YOU OKAY?
HUH?
IT'S SO NICE TO MEET--
HUH? IT'S OKAY. I'M FINE.
UNGH!
SO, WHERE DID YOU TWO MEET?
??
?
WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM TAKEMI?
I JUST FOUND HER.
?

IT IS THE WAY THINGS ARE TO BE
...I HAVE MADE MY DECISION
USUALLY PEOPLE GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER A BIT BETTER FIRST!
IT'S JUST THAT
I DON'T KNOW HOW THESE THINGS WORK
IS IT?
DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S A LITTLE STRANGE, YOUR MAJESTY?
BUT SHE'S YOUR GIRL-FRIEND?
WAIT, YOU MET HER YESTERDAY AND ALL YOU KNOW IS HER NAME?
BUT...
BUT!
HUH, KONDOU-SAN? DON'T YOU THINK...
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
ARE YOU GUYS DONE?
I...
FOR ALL YOU KNOW, HE COULD BE SOME PSYCHO
WHO MAKES OFF WITH LITTLE KIDS OR SOMETHING
I MEAN, DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIS MAJESTY?
IT'S A BIT STRANGE FOR HIS MAJESTY TO CALL YOU HIS "GIRLFRIEND" WHEN HE DOESN'T KNOW A THING ABOUT YOU?

I'M SORRY
THAT'S A SECRET
YOU
YOU
WHERE DID YOU COME FROM? I MEAN FOR REAL...
DON'T GO
COME BACK!!
SHOULD WE CALL HER "HER MAJESTY"?
A MOMENT
.....
THAT WAS WAY WEIRD
...I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE AYAME TO SOME OTHER PEOPLE
AS A MATTER OF FACT...
TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, ACTUALLY.
WHAT'S THE RUSH, KYO? GOT SOMEPLACE YOU HAVE TO BE?
BECAUSE I'M GETTING BORED.
I SUPPOSE
SHOWING OFF
...YOUR NEW POSSESSION THAT'S RATHER OUT OF CHARACTER FOR YOU, ISN'T IT?
HEY!
WAIT A SECOND!

AYAME IS SOOO CUTE! ISN'T SHE?
.....
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU TWO?
?
YEAH
MURA-KAMI
KIYONO...?
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'VE SEEN A GHOST
WHAT'S WRONG, MURAKAMI?
IT'S NOTHING
IT'S SOMETHING WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
THAT GIRL
NEXT TO ME?
BEFORE THAT, YOU DIDN'T NOTICE HER, DID YOU?
AFTER KYO POINTED AT YOU
NO.
KYOKO PROBABLY DIDN'T EITHER
IT WASN'T JUST YOU.
I DIDN'T SEE HER
NEITHER DID MURAKAMI
IT'S AS IF SHE MANAGED TO STAND IN ALL OF OUR BLIND SPOTS
DID YOU HAPPEN TO NOTICE
WHERE AYAME WAS STANDING BEFORE SHE WAS INTRODUCED?
IT IS SOMETHING WEREN'T YOU INTRODUCED TO HER THIS MORNING, KUSAKABE?
NO
I SEE IN THAT CASE, I GUESS IT'S NOTHING
SURE YOU DID!
BUT I NOTICED HER RIGHT AWAY!

EEH!
I'M SURE IT WAS JUST A COINCIDENCE!
I MEAN, YOU GUYS SAW HOW SMALL AND QUIET SHE WAS I'M SURE I JUST OVERLOOKED HER! RIGHT?
RYOKO.
WELL? WHICH IS IT, RYOKO?
HEY...
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
HOLD IT A SECOND, KONDOU.
I...
...DIDN'T SEE HER
DID YOU NOTICE ANYTHING STRANGE THEN?
AND THEN HE INTRODUCED ME TO KONDOU-SAN
AND?
HIS MAJESTY TAPPED ME ON THE SHOULDER
LET'S SEE...
BUT DID YOU SEE HER RIGHT AWAY?
DID YOU NOTICE HER BEFORE UTSUME INTRODUCED HER TO YOU? OR DID YOU ONLY SEE HER AFTER HE TOLD YOU SHE WAS THERE?
"HER NAME IS AYAME."
YIKES!

WE NEED TO KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON THOSE TWO
I KNOW I DON'T NEED TO TELL YOU TO KEEP YOUR MOUTHS CLOSED ABOUT WHAT JUST HAPPENED HERE
ESPECIALLY TO KYO
SIGH
YOU DON'T SOUND LIKE YOU'RE KIDDING
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU THINK THIS IS A JOKE YOU SAW THE SAME THING I DID!
A GHOST? FOR REAL?
YOU OUGHT TO PAY A LITTLE MORE ATTENTION, KONDOU
THAT KONDOU-SAN . THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT HER
I DON'T KNOW. BUT I DO KNOW THAT WE NEED TO BE MORE WARY
I AGREE
WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON HERE?
IF IT TURNS OUT THAT THERE'S NOTHING GOING ON, THEN GREAT! BUT I JUST DON'T WANT TO TAKE THE CHANCE THAT HIS MAJESTY IS UNDER SOME GHOST'S SPELL!
LOOK, WE'RE JUST GOING TO OBSERVE
LIGHTEN UP, AKI--
FINE I'M OFF TO THE CAFETERIA THEN
ME, TOO
MUM'S THE WORD!
I'M SERIOUS, TAKEMI, WATCH IT THAT FACE OF YOURS TELEGRAPHS EVERYTHING
..TO DISAPPEAR, WOULD YOU?
YOU WOULDN'T WANT YOUR BELOVED PRINCE OF DARKNESS .
!
.....
ka-slam

AYAME'S A GHOST, EH?
ATCH!
MAYBE IT'S JUST THAT AKI DOESN'T LIKE HER?
.....
I THOUGHT SO TOO BUT...
THEN SHE STARTED GETTING ALL SERIOUS ABOUT IT, SO I WASN'T SURE. SHE DEFINITELY WANTED US TO THINK SHE BELIEVES IT!
I'M SURE AKI-CHAN WAS JUST RIDDING AROUND
THERE'S NO WAY SHE REALLY BELIEVES HER OWN FAIRY TALE...
I'M SURE THAT AKI-CHAN AND THE OTHERS WILL GET USED TO IT!
BESIDES
. . I DON'T THINK THEY'LL HAVE TO DEAL WITH HER THAT MUCH! I DOUBT THEY'LL LET HIM BRING HER TO SCHOOL, RIGHT?
WELL, I THINK SHE'S CUTE! HIS MAJESTY COULD DO WORSE!

AND THEY'RE NOT THE KIND TO MAKE UP SOMETHING LIKE THAT, EITHER
. . I MEAN, THOSE TWO AREN'T INTO THAT SORT OF THING
I DON'T THINK IT'S JEALOUSY
I DON'T KNOW, #1.
WHAT D'YA SAY, FAN CLUBBER #2?
BUT
I CAN'T EITHER
YA KNOW?
AKI AND TOSHIYA ARE BOTH SO SMART, WITTY AND ATTRACTIVE. I JUST FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT TWO PEOPLE SO BLESSED... COULD GET JEALOUS OVER SOMETHING
I BET THEY'VE NEVER FELT ENVIOUS BEFORE IN THEIR WHOLE LIVES.
THEY'RE SO LUCKY
TAKEMI
-KUN?

LET'S CLOSE THE CURTAINS AND I'LL RACE YOU TO THE CAFETERIA
FINE, BUT NO HEAD START THIS TIME!!
bing bong
Please stay clear of the closing doors
Auxiliary High School Station
NOW I KNOW WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THIS..
LET'S GO
IT'S TIME FOR LUNCH
HEY.
THE WORST PART ABOUT ALL OF THIS...
IS HOW...
NOT HAVING SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE
DEPRESSING IT IS.
THERE'S NO POINT IN US GETTING ALL WORKED UP OVER THIS!
MY GRANDMOTHER ALWAYS USED TO SAY THAT "LOVE IS SO BITTER THAT EVEN A DOG WON'T EAT IT."
YEAH

...FOLLOW THEM?
WHY DON'T WE...
Hazama Station is the next stop Disembarking passengers please use caution
I'VE GOT AN IDEA
.....
GOOD THINKING, #2!

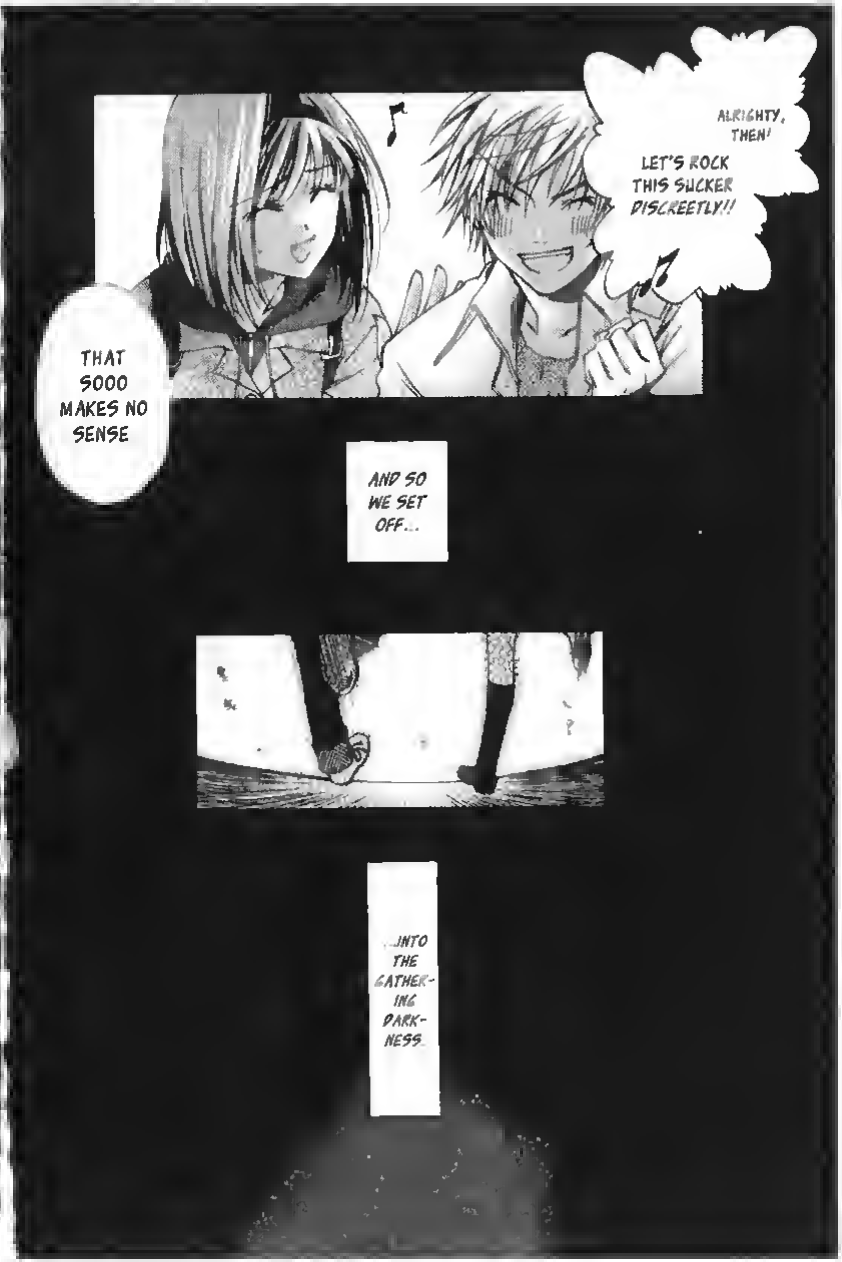
Hazama Station
THEY'RE GETTING OFF!

...BUT I FEEL LIKE SOME KIND OF SUPER SPY!
WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT..

...I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN HIS MAJESTY ON HIS WAY HOME...
He always seems to just kind of disappear!

LOOK! SHE'S WITH HIM, TOO!

ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?
Chapter 3
Waking Nightmares
JUST YOU...
YOU...
IF YOU TURN BACK NOW, YOU CAN STILL RETURN

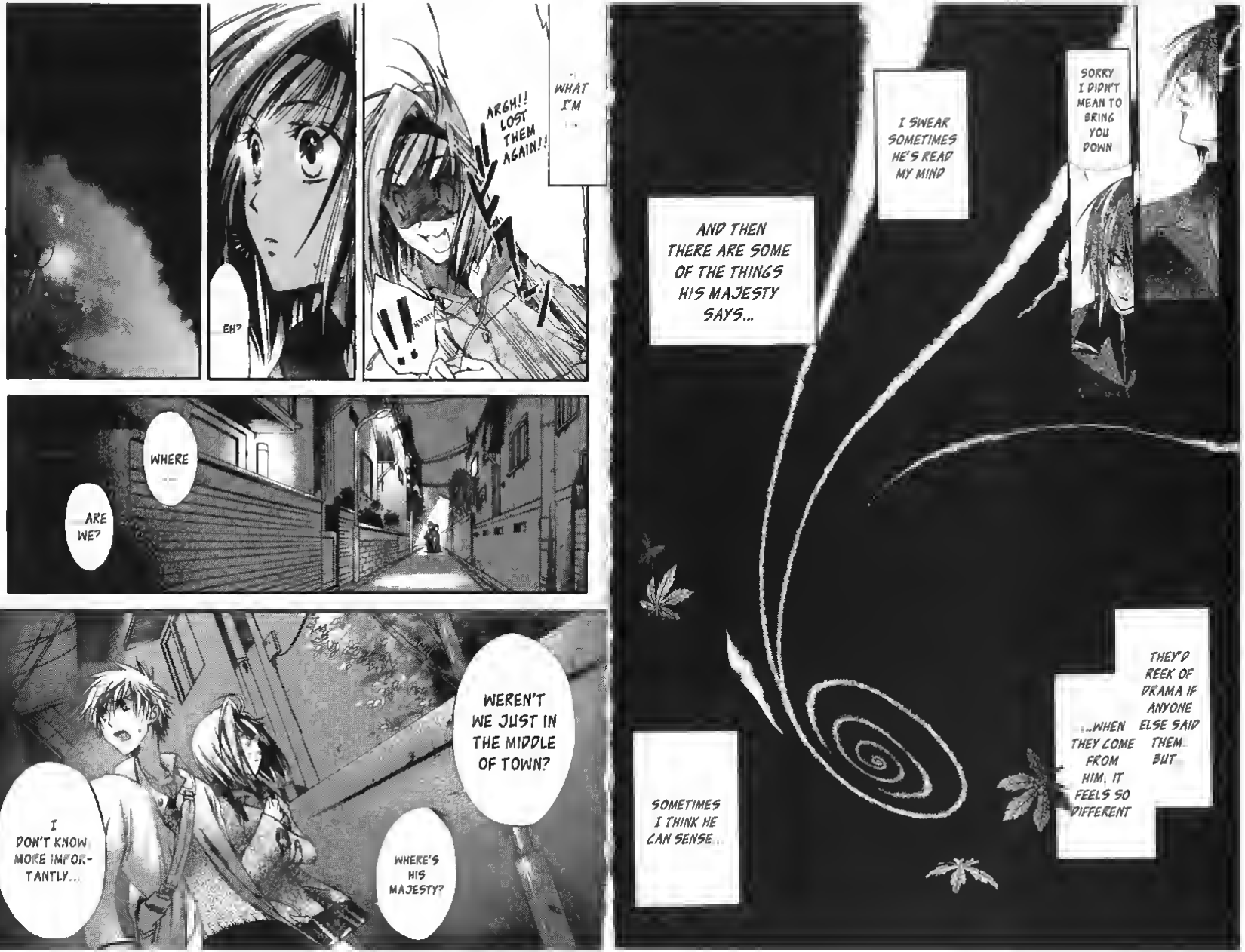

ALRIGHTY, THEN!
LET'S ROCK THIS SUCKER DISCREETLY!!
THAT SOOO MAKES NO SENSE
AND SO WE SET OFF...
...INTO THE GATHER-ING DARK-NESS.

I'M SORRY. SO SORRY.
DON'T MAKE ME KEEP REPEATING MYSELF.
.....

"HIS MAJESTY, THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS," A.K.A., KYOICHI UTSUME
HIS MAJESTY, WHO JUST YESTERDAY HAD CALLED LOVE, "SIMPLY GREED," FOUND HIMSELF A GIRLFRIEND HER NAME IS AYAME KONDOU
APPARENTLY SHE HAS THE SAME LAST NAME AS TAKEMI-KUN. STRANGE...
BUT HER NAME ISN'T THE STRANGEST THING ABOUT HER. SHE HAS A WAY OF APPEARING OUT OF NOWHERE, AS WELL AS A SHADOWY PAST
SO, SINCE WE JUST HAPPENED TO BE ON THE SAME TRAIN
I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SAY THIS...
BUT I'D LIKE TO PAT OUR CITY FATHERS ON THE BACK FOR ALLOWING URBAN SPRAWL TO PROGRESS THIS FAR!
JUST LOOK AT THIS PLACE! IT'S THE PERFECT SETTING FOR HIDE-AND-SEEK!!
winding streets and cute storehouse roofs!
Takemi kun
I MEAN, WE'RE PRACTICALLY IN THE KANTO REGION!
STOP DAYDREAMING! IT'S BECAUSE OF ALL THAT STUFF THAT WE'VE LOST THEM AGAIN!
WE'D ALREADY MANAGED TO LOSE SIGHT OF THEM SIX TIMES IN THAT FIRST HALF HOUR
WHAT'S WITH YOUR SUDDEN INTEREST IN URBAN PLANNING?

I MEAN, SURE. I'VE HAD A LOT OF THOSE WITH HIS MAJESTY, BUT...
OH MY GOSH WAS THERE AN ACCIDENT HERE?
EW. THEY LEFT TOYS, TOO.
I WONDER IF IT WAS A CHILD... THAT'S SO SAD.
HOW CREEPY
HOW DID YOU KNOW?
THAT'S THOSE FLOWERS ARE FROM?
YOU SMELL LIKE INCENSE... KUSAKABE.

...WE ARE NOW FOLLOWING THE LOVE-BIRDS IN QUESTION.
AGH! Where are they?! I can't take this anymore!
THERE THEY ARE!
LOOK!
MOVE IT BEFORE WE LOSE THEM AGAIN!
THEY SAY THAT FALLING IN LOVE CAN BE TRIGGERED BY...
SHARING DRAMATIC EXPERIENCES
Right?
YOU'VE SERIOUSLY SEEN WAY TOO MANY MOVIES..
DORK.
Jeez!
YOU'VE GOT A SIXTH SENSE ABOUT THEM WHAT IS IT? THE POWER OF JEALOUSY?
?

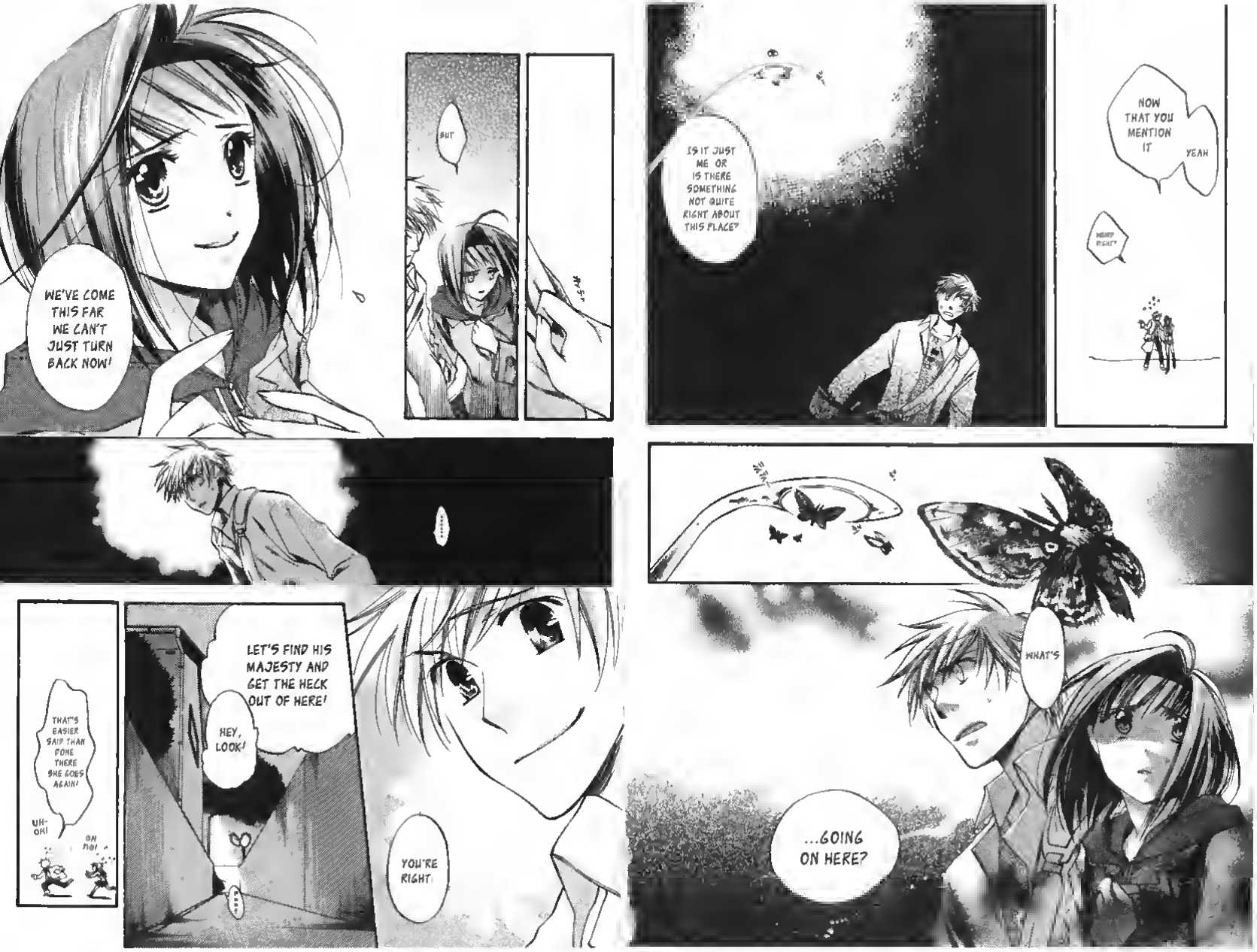

WHAT I'M
ARGH!! LOST THEM AGAIN!!
EH?
WHERE
ARE WE?
WEREN'T WE JUST IN THE MIDDLE OF TOWN?
I DON'T KNOW MORE IMPORTANTLY...
WHERE'S HIS MAJESTY?
SOMETIMES I THINK HE CAN SENSE...
AND THEN THERE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS HIS MAJESTY SAYS...
I SWEAR SOMETIMES HE'S READ MY MIND
SORRY I DIDN'T MEAN TO BRING YOU DOWN
...WHEN THEY COME FROM HIM, IT FEELS SO DIFFERENT
THEY'D REEK OF DRAMA IF ANYONE ELSE SAID THEM. BUT

HUH?
Bingo!
SURE IS! COME ON BEFORE WE LOSE SIGHT OF THEM AGAIN!
NO! THERE SHE IS! SHE WAS JUST IN THE SHADOWS BETWEEN THE STREETLIGHTS C'MON!
WE LOST HER!

rustle
THAT
DON'T SCARE ME LIKE. .
...HOW DO WE LEAVE?
WHO'S SCARING WHO NOW? HUH?
H-H-HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE OUMAGATOKI?! IT'S KIND OF LIKE THE "WITCHING HOUR," WHEN THE VEIL BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE SPIRIT WORLDS IS LIFTED, AND THE LIVING AND THE DEAD GET MIXED UP WITH ONE ANOTHER!
ISN'T ..
... THAT ...
.. KONDOU-SAN? OVER THERE ?
SORRY..

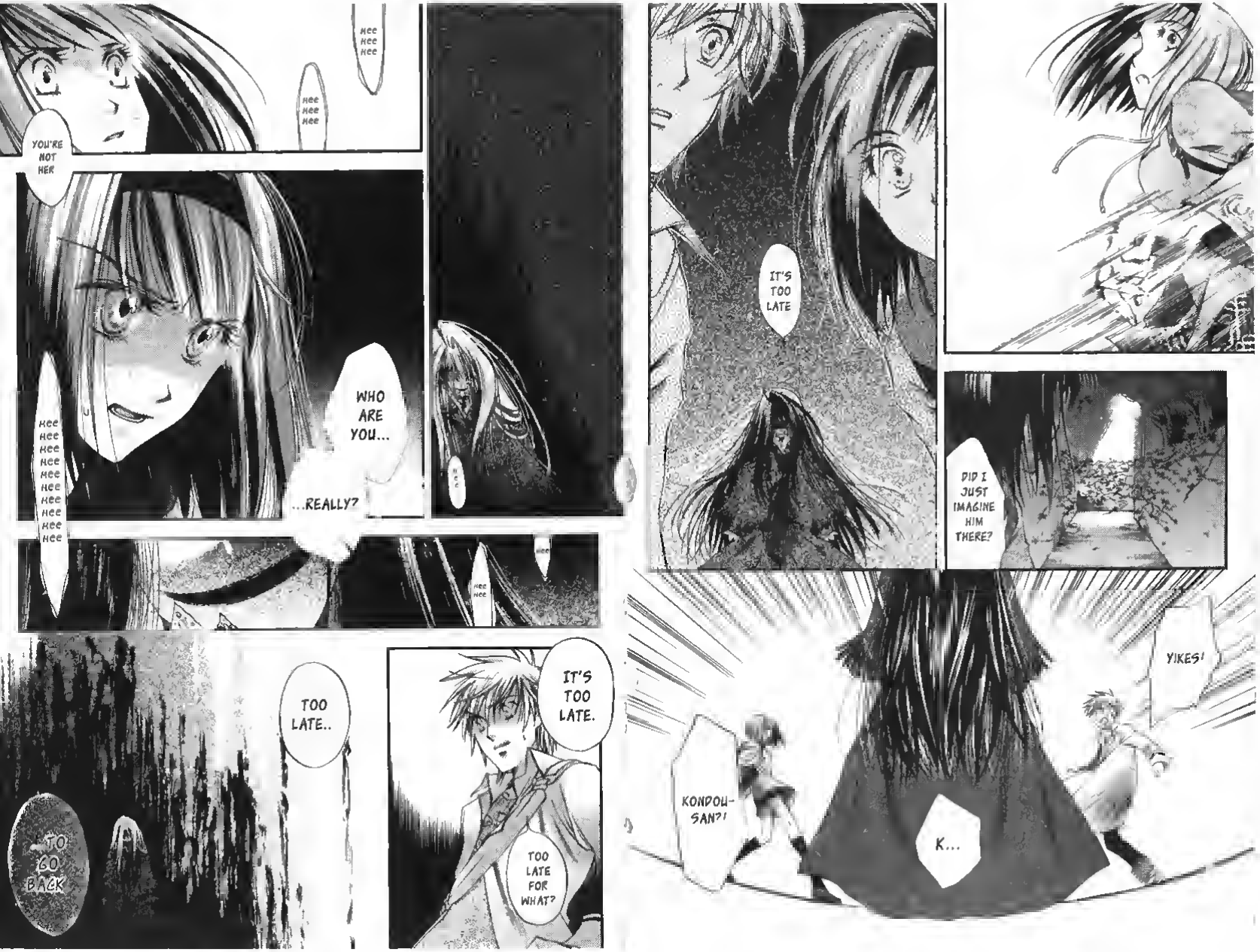
THAT WE HAVEN'T SEEN...
...HIS MAJESTY IN A WHILE?
THE SHADOWS MUST BE PLAYING TRICKS ON US. AGAIN
THIS IS SO WEIRD. I COULD HAVE SWORN SHE WASN'T THERE A SECOND AGO.
BY THE WAY...
UM...
HAVE YOU NOTICED...?

HUH?
SHE'S GONE... AGAIN.
SHE'S OVER THERE! SHE'S ABOUT TO TURN THE CORNER!
WHAT?! OH DAMN, THERE SHE IS!
LOOK!
I'M STARTING TO THINK WE'RE GOING TO END UP FINDING OUT
THAT KONDOU-SAN IS REALLY A WORLD CHAMPION SPEED WALKER!
.....


WE'VE COME THIS FAR WE CAN'T JUST TURN BACK NOW!
BUT
...
IS IT JUST ME OR IS THERE SOMETHING NOT QUITE RIGHT ABOUT THIS PLACE?
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT
YEAH
WHAT'S
...GOING ON HERE?
LET'S FIND HIS MAJESTY AND GET THE HECK OUT OF HERE!
HEY, LOOK!
YOU'RE RIGHT.
THAT'S EASIER SAID THAN DONE THERE SHE GOES AGAIN!
UH-OH!
OH NO!

...DEEPER AND DEEPER...
...I FEEL LIKE WE'RE FOLLOWING A WILL-O'-THE-WISP
AND THAT WE'RE BEING LURED...
...INTO SOMETHING NASTY.
I CAN'T HELP BUT...

WAI--
GKK!
WHAT THE...?
MY VOICE IS GONE...
Poof
DON'T GO!
YOUR MAJESTY!
WAIT!
tok
YOUR MAJESTY?
!!


Hee Hee Hee
Hee Hee Hee
YOU'RE NOT HER
Hee Hee Hee Hee Hee Hee Hee Hee Hee Hee
WHO ARE YOU...
...REALLY?
Hee Hee
Hee Hee
TOO LATE..
TO GO BACK
IT'S TOO LATE.
TOO LATE FOR WHAT?
IT'S TOO LATE
DID I JUST IMAGINE HIM THERE?
KONDOU-SAN?!
K...
YIKES!

TALKING ABOUT ..
...HIS MAJESTY?
IS SHE TALKING ABOUT KYO...?
ARE YOU...
LET US GO
TO THE OTHER SIDE
TO THE HALLOWED LANDS
TO THE VALLEY OF THE HIDDEN

US...?
CAN'T GO BACK...
CAN'T GO BACK NOW
WHO CAN'T?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "CAN'T GO BACK"?

CAN'T HELP ANY-MORE

WHO CAN'T GO BACK?
TELL ME!

KYO SHE SAID'S HAN NOT

WHO IS SHE TALKING ABOUT?
CAN'T GO BACK? WHO?
CAN'T HELP ANYMORE? WHAT?

SOMEONE IS GRABBING MY ARM!!
WHA...
No...
No!
TA.
TAKEMI-KUN.
!!
WHAT IS IT, RYOKO?
SOME-ONE
IS HOLD-ING
ONTO
MY ARM
SOME-THING
A LAND ETERNAL
OF EVER-LASTING PAIN-NESS

WHAT THE HELL...
...ARE THESE THINGS?
UNTIL THE UNREST IN YOU AND PLUNGE RED MIST
I
LET'S GO HOME
TO THOSE WITHOUT HUMAN SOULS
THOSE
THOSE WHO ARE NOT HUMAN
TO THE LAST OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT HUMAN
HUH
.....
N
a
a
a

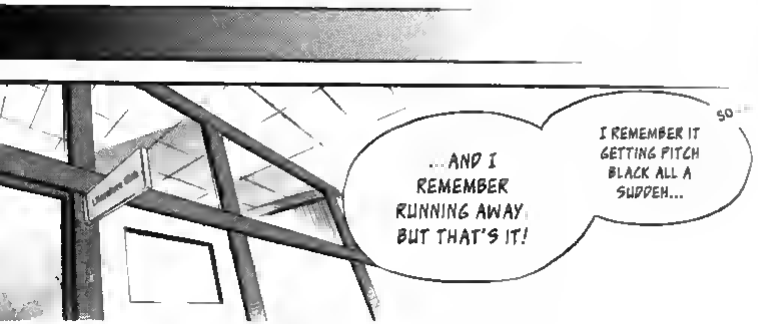
HOME
THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR HUMANITY
THOSE WITHOUT SOULS
SO THE LAMP FOR THOSE THAT ARE NOT HUMAN
LET US GO
LET US GO
LET US GO

EH?
I...
IT'S JUST TOO LATE
I'M SORRY. SO SORRY. IT'S TOO LATE.

HIS SOUL IS ..
HIS SOUL IS ON THE OTHER SIDE.
I WON'T GIVE HIM BACK.
HE'S MINE NOW
...NO LONGER
..."OVER THERE"
YOU DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING.
YOU DO NOT HAVE A LAMP OR A CAT'S EYE
...OR THE DARKNESS
YOU DO NOT POSSESS
...THE LIGHT
YOU CANNOT BRING HIM BACK.
Give him back
GIVE HIM BACK ..
GIVE HIM BACK
HIS MAJESTY
GIVE HIM BACK
STOP TALKING NONSENSE!
SHUT UP!
JUST BE QUIET!!

Yaaawn...
Hey!
YOU DON'T REMEMBER WHAT TIME I WENT TO BED LAST NIGHT, DO YOU?
I JUST HAD SUCH A WEIRD DREAM.
WHAT'S THAT? YOU FEELING OKAY, GIRL?
OH YEAH! I'M FINE...
HUH?
WHERE DID YOU GET OFF TO LAST NIGHT ANYWAY?
I WAS WONDERING THAT MYSELF.
HUH?
HELLO? ARE YOU TALKING IN YOUR SLEEP OR SOMETHING?
WHERE DID I GET OFF TO?
HOW'D YOU GET IN WITH NO ONE SEEING YOU?
WHERE INDEED?
BUT THEN YOU SUDDENLY APPEARED, OUT LIKE A LIGHT, AFTER I WENT TO THE BATHROOM
WHEN YOU WEREN'T BACK BY CURFEW, YOU HAD ME WORRIED SICK!
HMM?
HUH?
EH?
URM... YEAH
...OR YOU'LL BE LATE FOR CLASS!
YOU'D BETTER GET MOVING
AH! GOOD MORNING, SLEEPY HEAD!
slam
HUH?
WAS IT ALL...
...JUST A BAD DREAM?

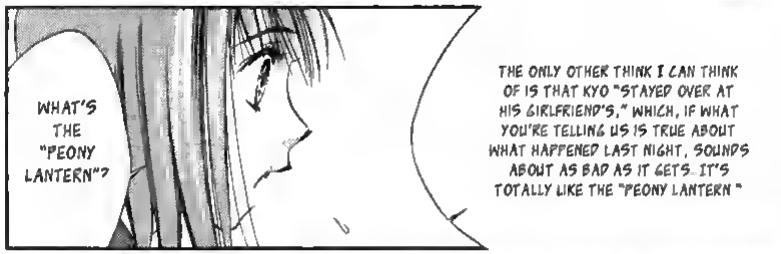
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN HIS MAJESTY AROUND, HAVE YOU?
I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM SINCE LAST NIGHT
HE'S NOT HOME OR AT SCHOOL-- HE'S JUST GONE!
HOW MUCH OF LAST NIGHT...
..WAS A DREAM?


...AND I REMEMBER RUNNING AWAY. BUT THAT'S IT!
I REMEMBER IT GETTING PITCH BLACK ALL A SUDDEN...
SO-

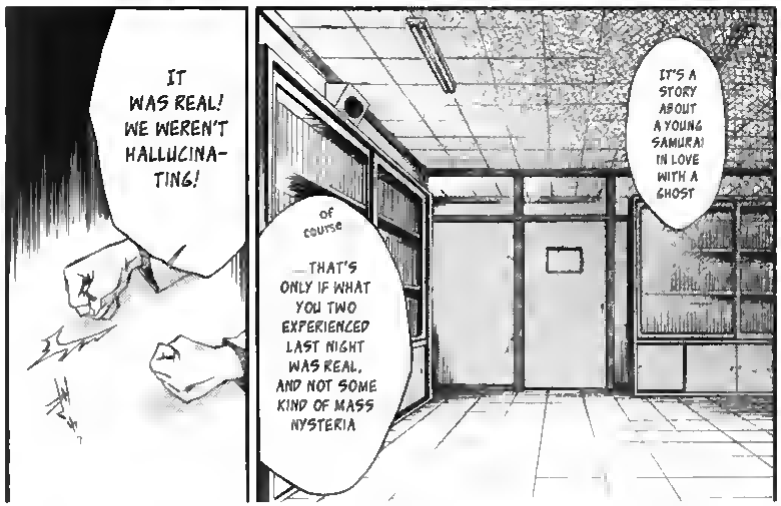
AND THEN...
WE WENT LOOKING FOR HIS MAJESTY
I'M TRYING REALLY HARD TO REMEMBER LAST NIGHT, BUT IT'S KIND OF FUZZY.
AND THEN WHAT?
...WHEN DID THE DREAM START...
AND IF SO...
WAS IT ALL JUST A DREAM?
rstl
rstl

TAKEMI-KUN! YOU SCARED ME!
THANK GOD YOU'RE SAFE, RYOKO!
..AND REALITY END?

CONSIDERING THE EVENTS YOU DESCRIBED, THE ODDS OF HIS MAJESTY HAVING DISAPPEARED ARE ABOUT 60%
AT ANY RATE...
.....
WELL.. HE'S BEEN THROUGH A LOT.



THE ONLY OTHER THINK I CAN THINK OF IS THAT KYO "STAYED OVER AT HIS GIRLFRIEND'S," WHICH, IF WHAT YOU'RE TELLING US IS TRUE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT, SOUNDS ABOUT AS BAD AS IT GETS. IT'S TOTALLY LIKE THE "PEONY LANTERN."

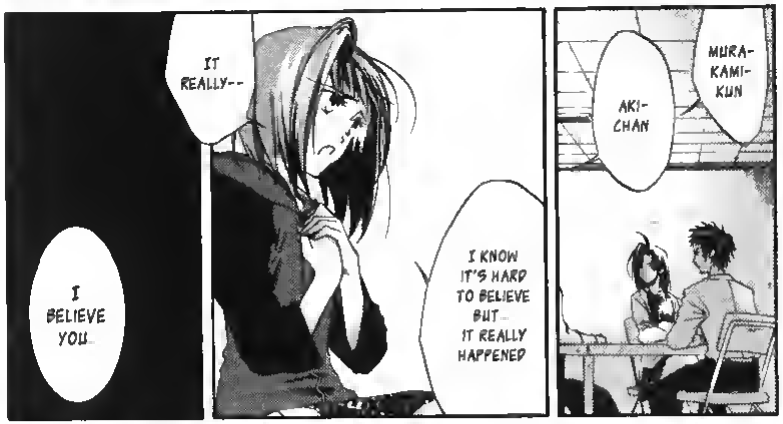

IT WAS REAL! WE WEREN'T HALLUCINATING!
of course
—THAT'S ONLY IF WHAT YOU TWO EXPERIENCED LAST NIGHT WAS REAL, AND NOT SOME KIND OF MASS HYSTERIA
IT'S A STORY ABOUT A YOUNG SAMURAI IN LOVE WITH A GHOST

.....
SEEING HOW KYO IS MYSTERIOUSLY ABSENT...
NORMALLY THIS CONVERSATION WOULD END WITH ME SAYING, "IT WAS JUST A DREAM, YOU IDIOT!" BUT...
"HOW THE HELL WOULD I KNOW?!"
I EVEN CALLED HIS HOUSE AND GOT HIS DAD. BUT AS SOON AS I ASKED HIM WHERE KYO WAS, HE JUST SNAPPED AT ME
FIRST THING THIS MORNING, BUT NO ANSWER
HAVE YOU TRIED HIS CELL?
WOW! SO HIS DAD WAS ACTUALLY HOME?
HIS DAD DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A REAL SUNSHINE PERSON
SO, HIS MAJESTY LIVES WITH HIS FATHER?
I JUST DID
YOU CALL THAT "LUCKY"?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "ACTUALLY @ HOME"?
WELL, HIS DAD USUALLY STAYS OVER AT HIS GIRLFRIEND'S
YOU'RE PRETTY LUCKY TO HAVE CAUGHT HIM

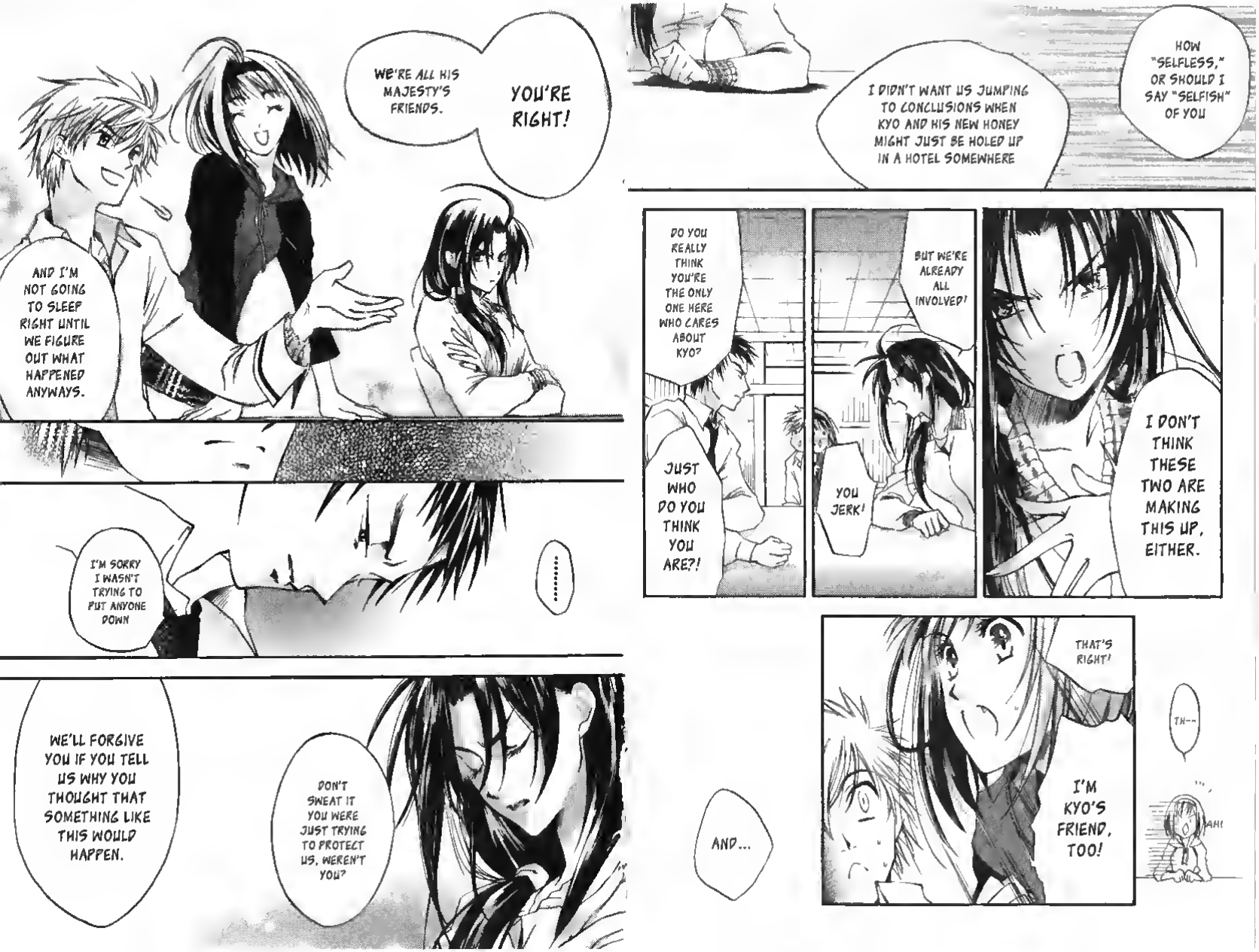
IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T DIG ANY DEEPER
LEAVE IT TO ME.
I'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING.
!?

UTSUME IS MY OLDEST FRIEND
I THINK I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING.
AND THIS ENTIRE SITUATION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO GET REAL UGLY, REAL QUICK

YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE US!
WE'RE NOT CRAZY


I BELIEVE YOU.
IT REALLY--
I KNOW IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE BUT... IT REALLY HAPPENED
AKI-CHAN
MURA-KAMI-KUN

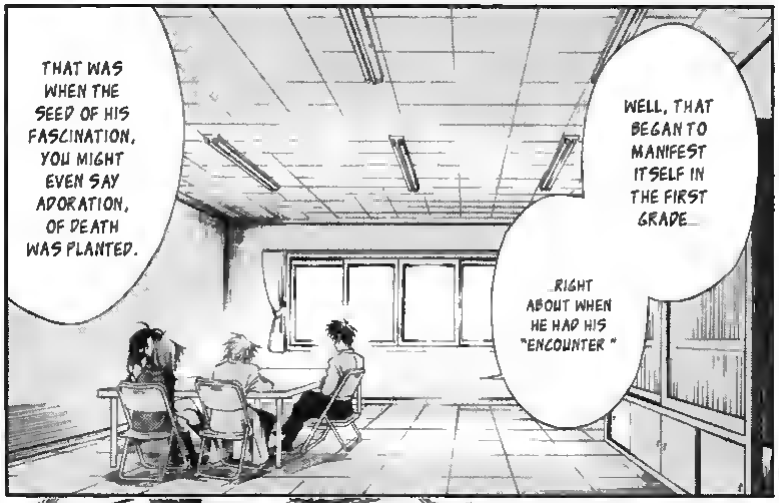
...THINK YOU'RE CRAZY.
SOME-THING LIKE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN?
I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT ONE DAY, SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
I DON'T...


HOW "SELFLESS," OR SHOULD I SAY "SELFISH" OF YOU
I DIDN'T WANT US JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS WHEN KYO AND HIS NEW HONEY MIGHT JUST BE HOLED UP IN A HOTEL SOMEWHERE
I DON'T THINK THESE TWO ARE MAKING THIS UP, EITHER.
BUT WE'RE ALREADY ALL INVOLVED!
YOU JERK!
DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO CARES ABOUT KYO?
JUST WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!
YOU'RE RIGHT!
WE'RE ALL HIS MAJESTY'S FRIENDS.
AND I'M NOT GOING TO SLEEP RIGHT UNTIL WE FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED ANYWAYS.
I'M SORRY I WASN'T TRYING TO PUT ANYONE DOWN
.....
DON'T SWEAT IT YOU WERE JUST TRYING TO PROTECT US, WEREN'T YOU?
WE'LL FORGIVE YOU IF YOU TELL US WHY YOU THOUGHT THAT SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
AND...
THAT'S RIGHT!
I'M KYO'S FRIEND, TOO!
TH--
AH!

BE STRAIGHT WITH US, MURAKAMI
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

SHE WAS THERE. AS REAL AS YOU OR I
HIS MAJESTY HAS BEEN THE SAME
EVER SINCE I FIRST MET HIM...
OBSESSED WITH A WORLD OTHER THAN OUR OWN.
EVER SINCE...
I WANTED TO GO WITH HER, BUT...

YOU ALL KNOW THAT UTSUME CAN SOMETIMES SENSE THINGS, RIGHT? IT'S ALMOST LIKE E.S.P. OR SOMETHING
HE'S ALWAYS SAID THAT ONE DAY, HE'D LIKE TO SEE IT AGAIN
.....


THAT WAS WHEN THE SEED OF HIS FASCINATION, YOU MIGHT EVEN SAY ADORATION, OF DEATH WAS PLANTED.
WELL, THAT BEGAN TO MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE FIRST GRADE...
RIGHT ABOUT WHEN HE HAD HIS "ENCOUNTER."

Chapter 4
The Hidden World

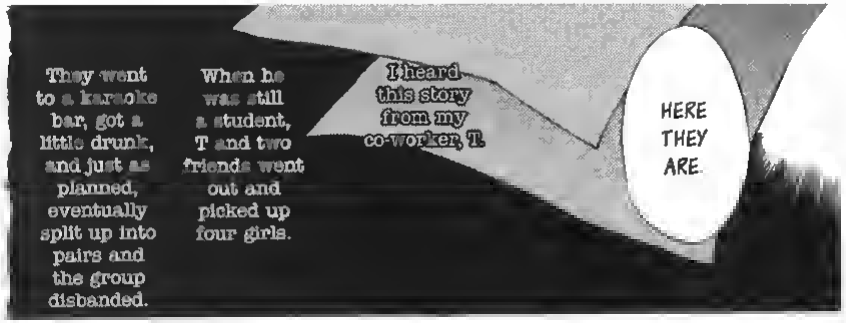
HE'S PLAYING A VERY DANGEROUS GAME
AND HE MAY NOT CARE WHETHER HE WINS OR LOSES
...ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...
BUT I CARE. AND I VOWED
NOT TO LET UTSUME BE CONSUMED BY THE DARKNESS
IT'S NOT THAT HE'S JUST INTERESTED IN THE OCCULT
THAT'S JUST AN EXTENSION, AN ASPECT, OF HIS GLAMORIZATION OF DEATH
HE THINKS
THAT GHOST IS HIS TICKET OVER TO WHAT HE CALLS THE "OTHER SIDE"
YOU MAKE HIM SOUND LIKE A SUICIDE CASE!
OR WHY
I'M NOT SURE THAT EVEN UTSUME HIMSELF KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING
I WOULDN'T RULE IT OUT
I'M NOT AN EXPERT ON THIS OCCULT STUFF, BUT I KNOW ONE THING
...YES.
INTER-ESTING
HMM
ARE YOU
ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE THAT WHAT KYO MET WAS A GHOST?

NO
A KAMIKAKUSHI A STEALER OF SOULS.
"WHY ARE YOU SO INTO THESE OLD GHOST STORIES?"
slide
AND THEN HE SAID, "I'D LIKE TO TALK TO IT, SO I'M LOOKING FOR THEM NOW."
AND KYO SAID, "I SAW ONE OF THEM A LONG TIME AGO."
HE WANTED TO MEET A GHOST?
WHAT KYO MET YEARS AGO WASN'T A GHOST
IT WAS SOMETHING MUCH MORE FOUL
AWHILE BACK, I BORROWED SOME BOOKS FROM HIS MAJESTY. TWO OF THEM REALLY PIQUED MY INTEREST, SO I PHOTOCOPIED THEM.
KYO HAD MADE EXTENSIVE NOTES IN BOTH OF THEM. LATER ON, CURIOSITY GOT THE BETTER OF ME AND I ASKED HIM ABOUT IT.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
YOU'RE HOLDING SOMETHING BACK FROM US. WHY?
JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE KNOWN KYO LONGEST DOESN'T MEAN YOU KNOW HIM BEST.

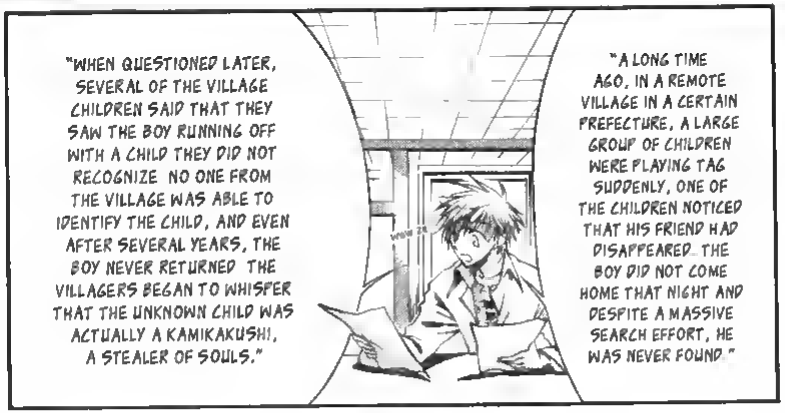
ALL RIGHT, WELL CONSIDER THIS NEXT I BORROWED A BOOK FROM KYO CALLED "KAMIKAKUSHI." KYO HAD PRACTICALLY WORN THE PAGES OUT OF THAT ONE
SURE, I GUESS THERE ARE SOME SIMILARITIES TO OUR CASE, BUT...
I MEAN, PEOPLE GO MISSING ALL THE TIME...

WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO COME CLEAN, MURAKAMI?
AND NOW HIS MAJESTY HAS GONE MISSING.

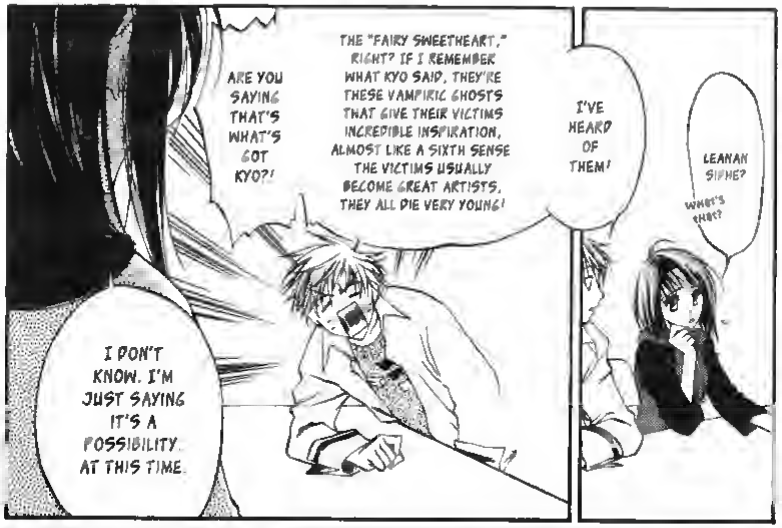
YOU KNOW SOMETHING ELSE ABOUT THIS. IF YOU CARE ABOUT KYO AT ALL, PUT YOUR CARDS ON THE TABLE!


They went to a karaoke bar, got a little drunk, and just as planned, eventually split up into pairs and the group disbanded.
When he was still a student, T and two friends went out and picked up four girls.
I heard this story from my co-worker, T.
HERE THEY ARE.

To this day, no one has been able to identify the long-haired girl, and the fate of M is unknown.
—Eiichirou Oosako, Modern Urban Legends
M was last seen with a long-haired girl. However, when the girls from that night were separately questioned, they all said, "We don't know anyone like that." They had assumed she was a friend of M and company.
The next day, however, one of the boys, M, was nowhere to be found. He never made it home that night, and he didn't answer his cell phone. After he didn't turn up for a few days, his friends filed a missing person's report.

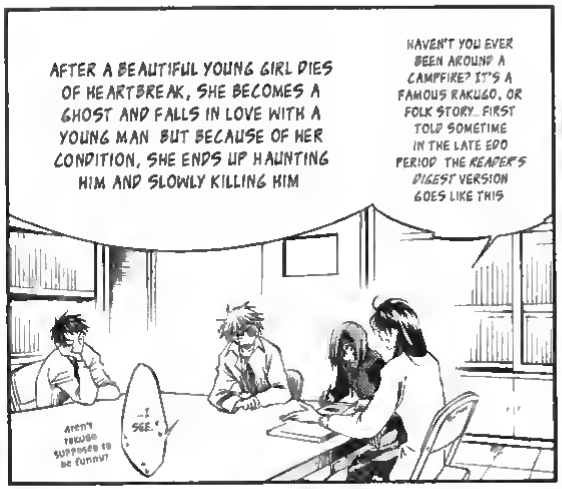

"WHEN QUESTIONED LATER, SEVERAL OF THE VILLAGE CHILDREN SAID THAT THEY SAW THE BOY RUNNING OFF WITH A CHILD THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE. NO ONE FROM THE VILLAGE WAS ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE CHILD, AND EVEN AFTER SEVERAL YEARS, THE BOY NEVER RETURNED. THE VILLAGERS BEGAN TO WHISPER THAT THE UNKNOWN CHILD WAS ACTUALLY A KAMIKAKUSHI, A STEALER OF SOULS."
"A LONG TIME AGO, IN A REMOTE VILLAGE IN A CERTAIN PREFECTURE, A LARGE GROUP OF CHILDREN WERE PLAYING TAG. SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE CHILDREN NOTICED THAT HIS FRIEND HAD DISAPPEARED. THE BOY DID NOT COME HOME THAT NIGHT AND DESPITE A MASSIVE SEARCH EFFORT, HE WAS NEVER FOUND."

SO
FROM WHAT YOU TWO SAW, DO YOU THINK THERE'S ANY WAY TO TALK HER INTO RETURNING KYO?
DOUBT-FUL
SHE SURE TOLD ME OFF...
I APOLOGIZE I'LL TELL YOU WHAT I KNOW
SHE KEPT REPEATING THAT HE "COULDN'T GO BACK."
BUT IT WAS ALL SING-SONGY, LIKE A NURSERY RHYME, OR A POEM
A POEM?
WE'D APPRECIATE IT
YOU TWO HERE. YOU'RE OUR KEY WITNESSES SO DON'T JUST STAND THERE WITH YOUR JAWS ON THE FLOOR. PAY ATTENTION!
YES, MA'AM
SORRY! WE'LL TRY HARDER!
THAT DOESN'T SOUND GOOD
SOMEONE ONCE TOLD ME THAT AT THE HEART OF IT, SPELLS HAVE THE SAME ROOT AS POEMS AND SONGS..
YOU'RE SURE THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID?
I THINK SO.
HE WAS ALWAYS GOING ON ABOUT THE POWER OF WORDS
IT WAS HIS MAJESTY.
THE DEEPER WE DIG, THE MORE LIKE THE "PEONY LANTERN" THIS SOUNDS
WRITE DOWN WHAT SHE SAID TO YOU ON THE BACK OF THIS FOR ME. AS MUCH AS YOU CAN REMEMBER
OK!
A QUESTION TEACH!
IF I CARE ABOUT KYO AT ALL, EH?

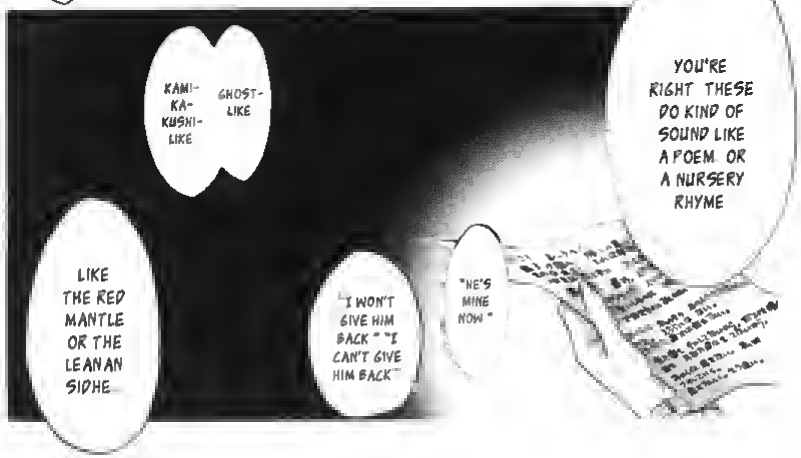

ARE YOU SAYING THAT'S WHAT'S GOT KYO?!
I DON'T KNOW. I'M JUST SAYING IT'S A POSSIBILITY AT THIS TIME.
THE "FAIRY SWEETHEART," RIGHT? IF I REMEMBER WHAT KYO SAID, THEY'RE THESE VAMPIRIC GHOSTS THAT GIVE THEIR VICTIMS INCREDIBLE INSPIRATION, ALMOST LIKE A SIXTH SENSE THE VICTIMS USUALLY BECOME GREAT ARTISTS, THEY ALL DIE VERY YOUNG!
I'VE HEARD OF THEM!
LEANAN SIDHE?
WHAT'S THAT?

ACTUAL LV
GOOD ONE RYOKO! SNORT!
FIGURES HIS MAJESTY WOULD GO FOR A FAIRY! SNICKER

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT...?
...I'M QUITE SURE IT'S A KAMIKAKUSHI THAT'S GOT KYO.


AFTER A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL DIES OF HEARTBREAK, SHE BECOMES A GHOST AND FALLS IN LOVE WITH A YOUNG MAN BUT BECAUSE OF HER CONDITION, SHE ENDS UP HAUNTING HIM AND SLOWLY KILLING HIM
HAVEN'T YOU EVER BEEN AROUND A CAMPFIRE? IT'S A FAMOUS RAKUGO, OR FOLK STORY... FIRST TOLD SOMETIME IN THE LATE EDO PERIOD. THE REAPER'S DIGEST VERSION GOES LIKE THIS
AREN'T RAKUGO SUPPOSED TO BE FUNNY?
...I SEE.
HOW'S THIS "PEONY LANTERN" STORY GO ANYWAY?

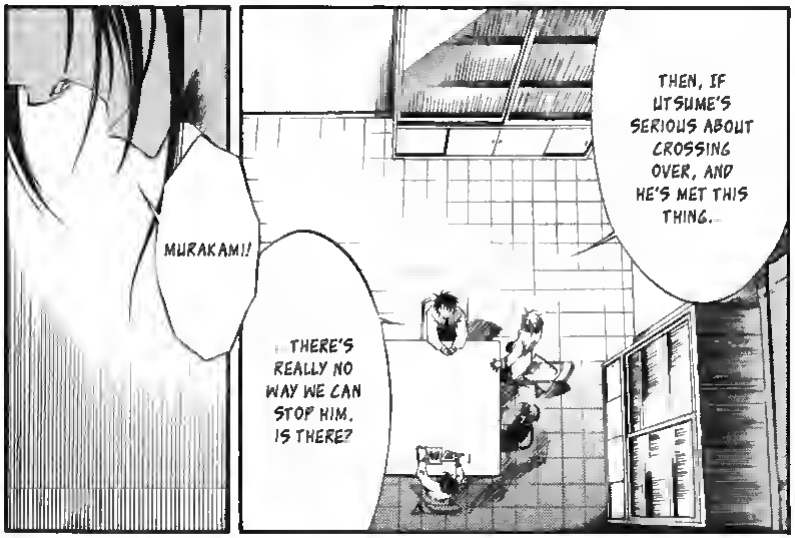
"CAN'T HELP ANY-MORE," EH?
THAT WAS FAST
HERE YOU GO! AS MUCH AS I CAN REMEMBER

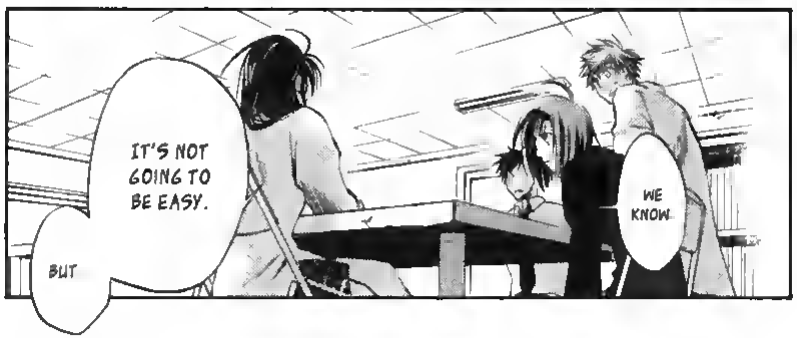

KAMI-KA-KUSHI-LIKE
GHOST-LIKE
YOU'RE RIGHT. THESE DO KIND OF SOUND LIKE A POEM. OR A NURSERY RHYME
LIKE THE RED MANTLE OR THE LEANAN SIDHE...
"I WON'T GIVE HIM BACK" "I CAN'T GIVE HIM BACK"
"HE'S MINE NOW."

YOU WEREN'T TELLING US THE WHOLE STORY, RIGHT?
WHEN I SAID THAT UTSUME SAW A "GHOST" BEFORE...
RIGHT A DETAIL ABOUT THE GHOST
WELL, THERE IS A PRECEDENT
AND BY THE WAY, KIDONO
UTSUME DIDN'T JUST SEE IT.
I KNOW YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF RESPECT FOR KYO.
I THINK HE WENT WITH THIS THING UNDER HIS OWN VOLITION.
BE CHARMED BY SOMETHING LIKE A FAIRY
KYO'S GOT TOO STRONG OF A PERSONALITY TO...
TO THE REST OF THE WORLD, HE'S JUST ANOTHER GLOOMY HIGH-SCHOOL JUNIOR
BUT...
..MIGHT BE IN OVER HIS HEAD?
ONE WHO...
THIS TIME I'LL TELL YOU THE WHOLE STORY, THE WAY KYO TOLD IT TO ME
MY HAND

SOMEONE TOOK MY HAND
AND GUIDED ME THROUGH THE DARK-NESS
THE DARKNESS WAS A BLINDFOLD
I COULD FEEL THEM AROUND ME IN THE PLACE TOWARDS WHICH WE WERE HEADING
ONE GUIDED ME
BUT THEY DIDN'T TAKE ME
I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS I DON'T REMEMBER HOW I GOT HOME
OR HOW I HURT MY HEAD
BUT I...
I WANTED

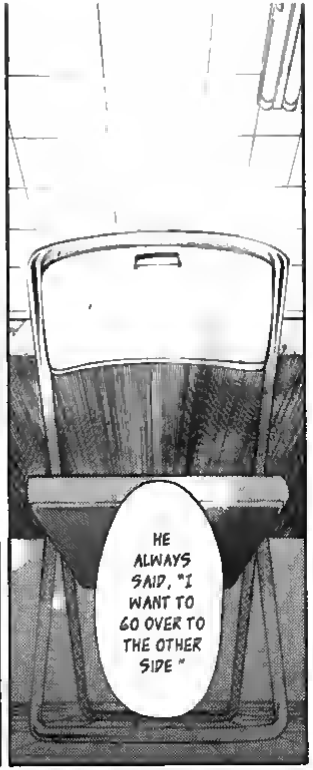
MORE OR LESS
YUP
WE KNOW ABOUT BOTH OF THOSE STORIES FROM UTSUME'S BOOKS, RIGHT?
THE LEANAN SIDHE AND THE KAMIKAKUSHI

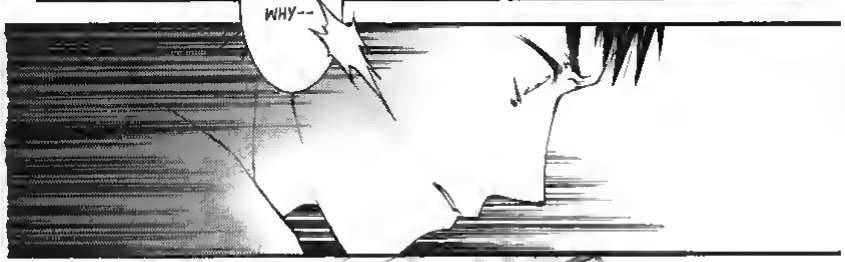

MURAKAMI!!
THERE'S REALLY NO WAY WE CAN STOP HIM, IS THERE?
THEN, IF UTSUME'S SERIOUS ABOUT CROSSING OVER, AND HE'S MET THIS THING...


BUT
IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY.
WE KNOW.

WAIT!
I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT DESPITE KNOWING EVERYTHING WE KNOW, UTSUME AGREED TO GO WITH THIS SPIRIT.

YOU'RE MAKING IT SOUND LIKE HIS MAJESTY WANTED ALL OF THIS TO HAPPEN! TO GET TAKEN AWAY TO THAT HORRIBLE PLACE!
I DON'T THINK HE COULD RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO UTSUME A CHANCE TO SEE IT AFTER ALL THIS TIME WOULD BE WORTH THE RISK


HE ALWAYS SAID, "I WANT TO GO OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE."


WHICH IS WHY--

MURAKAMI?
?

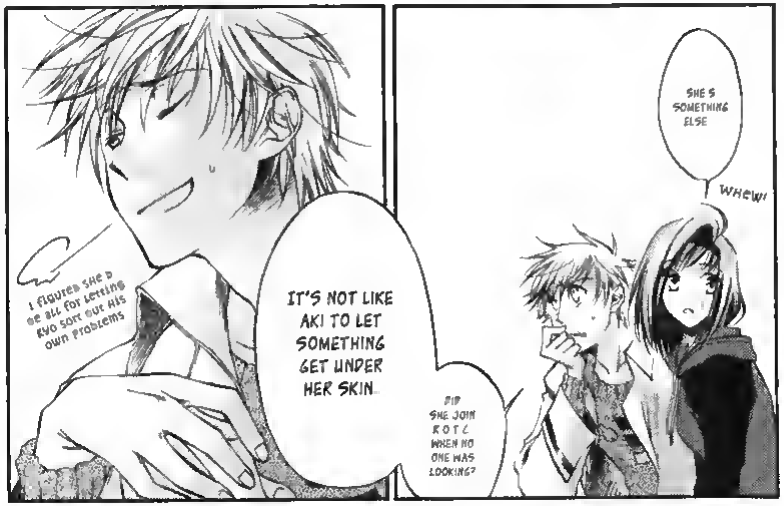
I HAVE AN IDEA
IT'S KIND OF HARD TO COME UP WITH A REASONABLE PLAN OF ACTION
SINCE WE REALLY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WE'RE GOING TO BE FACING
I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO TELL US EVERY-THING?
YOU'RE STILL HOLDING YOUR CARDS CLOSE TO YOUR CHEST
CARE TO SHARE?
WHAT? HOW COME I NEED A BABY-SITTER?!
YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO GO OFF ON YOUR OWN WHATSO-EVER!
BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WITHOUT A CELL PHONE, RIGHT?
IF ANY OF US FINDS SOMETHING OUT, WE WILL CONTACT ALL THE MEMBERS RIGHT AWAY
FINE FOR NOW, WE SPLIT UP AND INVESTIGATE ON OUR OWN
ESPECIAL-LY YOU, MURA-KAMI
HOWEVER, TRY TO TRAVEL IN PAIRS! IT'S SAFER THAT WAY, RIGHT?

DON'T THINK ANOTHER NEGATIVE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS
FAILURE IS JUST
NOT AN OPTION
WE HAVE TO TRY AND BRING HIM BACK
WE JUST HAVE TO DO IT, UNDER-STAND?
I UNDER-STAND

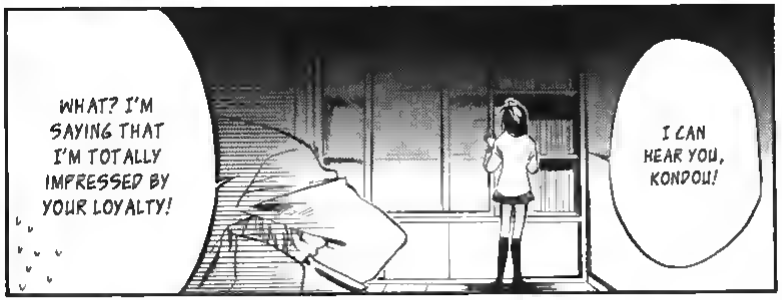
I COULDN'T
LEAVE ANYONE IN THE KIND OF DIRE STRAITS THAT KYO IS IN COULD YOU?

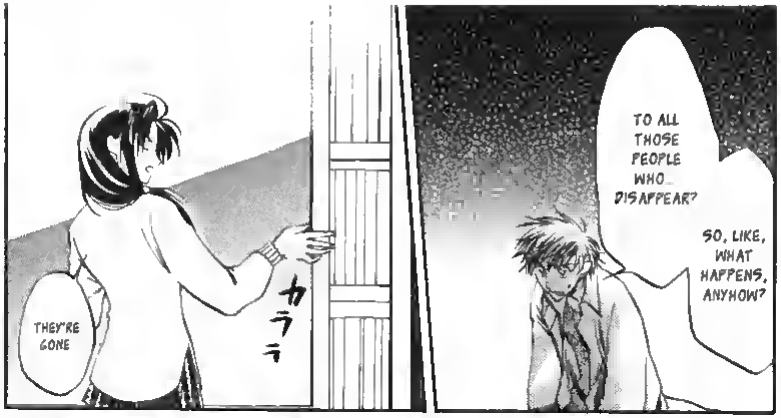
K-DONO!!
THAT IS ALL. YOU'RE DISMISSED
!!
WE WOULDN'T WANT YOU RUNNING AROUND LOOKING FOR A PAY PHONE WHEN YOU FINALLY UNCOVERED SOMETHING EARTH-SHATTERING!

TAKEMI-KUN, HAVEN'T YOU BEEN LISTENING?
DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S THAT BAD?


I figured she'd be all for letting Kyo sort out his own problems
IT'S NOT LIKE AKI TO LET SOMETHING GET UNDER HER SKIN
DID SHE JOIN K O T C WHEN NO ONE WAS LOOKING?
WHEW!
SHE'S SOMETHING ELSE

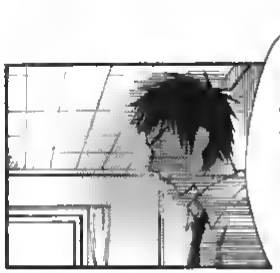
KONDOU
I FIGURED WE'D JUST BE ABLE TO FIND HIM AND BRING HIM HOME
I MEAN, THIS IS HIS MAJESTY WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. DO YOU REALLY THINK THIS IS A LIFE-OR-DEATH SITUATION?


WHAT? I'M SAYING THAT I'M TOTALLY IMPRESSED BY YOUR LOYALTY!
I CAN HEAR YOU, KONDOU!


THEY'RE GONE
カラ
TO ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO... DISAPPEAR?
SO, LIKE, WHAT HAPPENS, ANYHOW?

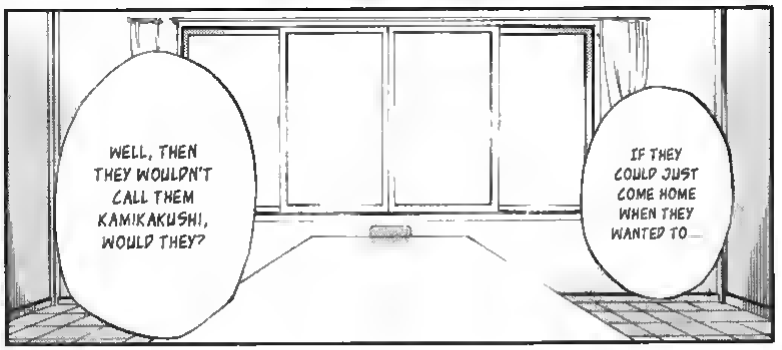
IF KYO...
KNEW WHAT KIND OF DANGER HE WAS IN, AND STILL ACCEPTED THE RISK...
...HE'S LESS THAN THE GENIUS WE MADE HIM OUT TO BE

PROBABLY KILLED SOMETIMES THEIR MUTILATED CORPSES POP UP SOMEWHERE
BUT FOR THE MOST PART, THEY'RE JUST GONE MISSING
LIKE FROM A HORROR MOVIE?!
THAT'S WHAT WE'RE FACING? A SUPER-NATURAL KILLER?


ACCORDING TO KYO'S BOOKS, FEW SOULS, IF ANY, EVER MAKE IT BACK FROM THE OTHER SIDE

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE EXPRESSION "SPIRITED AWAY" USED FOR PEOPLE WHO DISAPPEAR WITHOUT A TRACE?

IF IT WERE ANYONE OTHER THAN KYO, I'D HAVE SAID A PRAYER FOR THEM BY NOW, AND GONE ABOUT MY BUSINESS

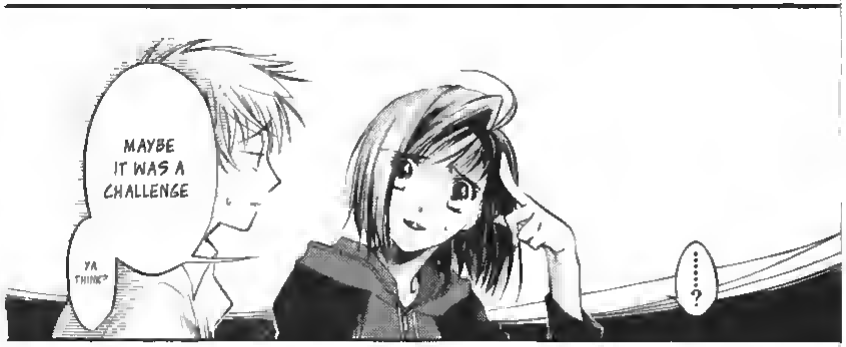

WELL, THEN THEY WOULDN'T CALL THEM KAMIKAKUSHI, WOULD THEY?
IF THEY COULD JUST COME HOME WHEN THEY WANTED TO...

I didn't think Ayame was like that!!!
W-W-WAS THAT WHAT THAT WAS?!
That's not even funny, dude!!
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN YOU TWO SURE WALKED RIGHT INTO IT, DIDN'T YOU?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN, THE WAY YOU DESCRIBE HER, SHE'S A BLOODTHIRSTY MONSTER. THAT WOULD MEAN WE NEVER SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN AWAY FROM HER ON OUR OWN
GULP

WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE SHE LET US GO, THEN?

BUT WHY WOULD SHE DO THAT?
I THINK KONDOU-SAN LET US GO ON PURPOSE!
SHE HAD US COMPLETELY IN HER POWER.


MAYBE IT WAS A CHALLENGE
YA THINK?
.....?

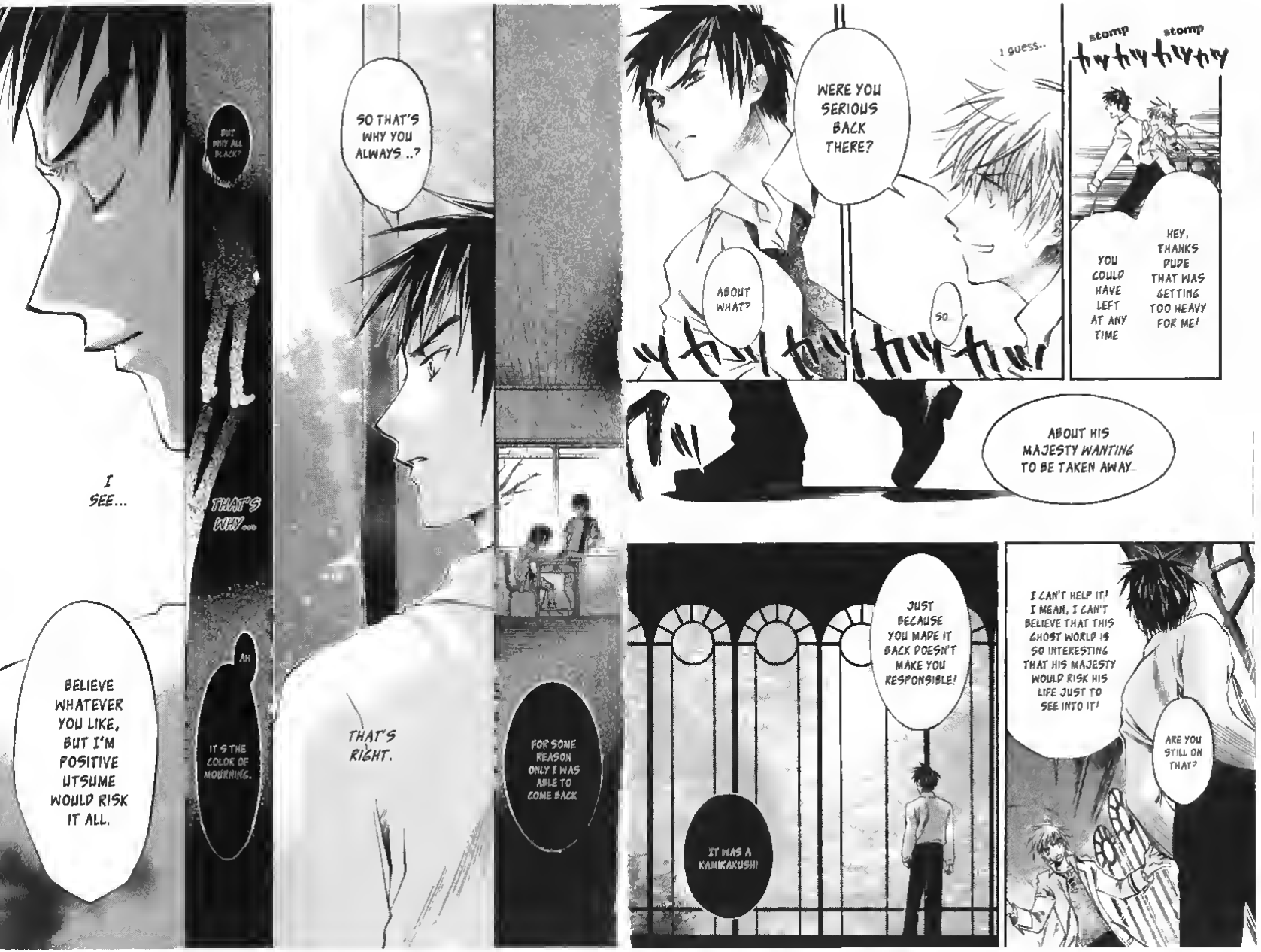
I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE TRYING TO BE KIND OR CRUEL, AKI-CHAN
SOME-TIMES

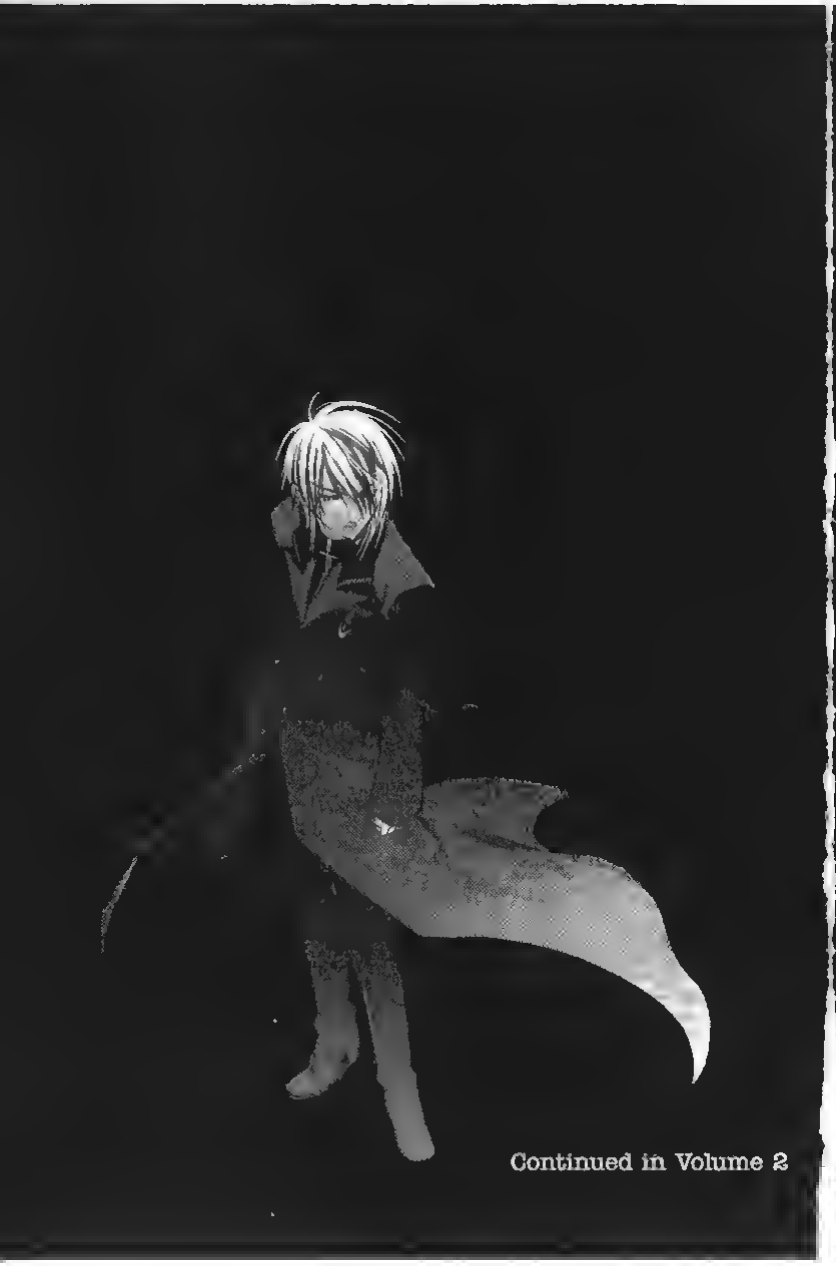
WE WON'T KNOW ANYTHING UNTIL WE ASK KYO HIMSELF.
AND IF HE GETS IN TROUBLE BECAUSE OF HIS OWN NEGLIGENCE...
...WE STILL OWE IT TO THE FOOL TO TRY AND SAVE HIM
GULP

.....
THEN THE COURT WILL TREAT HIM TO AN EXECUTION
A BRILLIANT PLAN!
BUT.
IF KYO WENT WITH HER WILLINGLY BUT ENDS UP NEEDING OUR HELP
I'VE GOT A QUESTION ASSUMING THIS IS SOMEHOW HIS FAULT, HOW SHOULD HIS MAJESTY TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS ACTIONS?
PROBABLY NOT
DO YOU THINK IT MATTERS?
HMM NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT IT
LET ME THINK.
THAT'S A GOOD ONE.
BUT IF.
THAT'S RIGHT
AND EVEN THEN, IN THE END, IT WAS A CHOICE HE MADE
BECAUSE HE'S NOT A VICTIM?
BUT IF HE GETS ANNOYED WITH US FOR "BUTTING IN," THEN I GUESS IT'S A WASH
WELL. IF HE'S THE VICTIM AND IS CONTRITE, THEN I SUPPOSE HE PROBABLY OWES EACH OF US A SODA

I KNOW!!
SO DON'T START FEELING SORRY FOR SOMEONE WHO'S PROBABLY DEAD ALREADY ANYWAYS!
RIGHT NOW, WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF YOU'LL EVER SEE YOUR BELOVED PRINCE OF DARKNESS AGAIN!
KONDOU-CHAN? SHE'S A PROBLEM.
WHAT ABOUT AYAME?
ARE YOU AN ENEMY SYMPA-THIZER?
WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO HER?!
I KNOW IT'S YOUR NATURE TO BE KIND TO EVERYONE, BUT WE'RE DEALING WITH SOMETHING THAT IS COMPLETELY RUTHLESS REMEMBER THAT.
WELL, I SUPPOSE SHE'LL JUST HAVE TO DISAPPEAR, WON'T SHE?
SHE'S NOT SO BAD, THOUGH
WE'VE HARDLY EVEN SPOKEN TO HER
WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HER
I KNOW
BUT
BUT

I'VE GOT A LEAD TO FOLLOW.
I THINK WE'VE DONE ALL WE CAN HERE
MURA-KAMI?
HUH?
THEN
. I'LL GO WITH YOU
NEVER MIND IT'S NOTHING
WAS WHAT?
AND BACK THERE.
HER EXPRESSION WAS...
Great! I'll call if we find out anything!
"DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO CARES ABOUT KYO?"
NO--
FINE.
I KNOW I KNOW...
SYMPATHY IS A LUXURY WE DON'T HAVE IF WE'RE GOING TO SAVE HIS MAJESTY.
RYOKO?


BUT WHY ALL BLACK?
I SEE...
THAT'S WHY...
AH
IT'S THE COLOR OF MOURNING.
BELIEVE WHATEVER YOU LIKE, BUT I'M POSITIVE UTSUME WOULD RISK IT ALL.
SO THAT'S WHY YOU ALWAYS ..?
THAT'S RIGHT.
FOR SOME REASON ONLY I WAS ABLE TO COME BACK
WERE YOU SERIOUS BACK THERE?
I GUESS..
ABOUT WHAT?
SO
ABOUT HIS MAJESTY WANTING TO BE TAKEN AWAY...
stomp stomp
YOU COULD HAVE LEFT AT ANY TIME
HEY, THANKS DUDE THAT WAS GETTING TOO HEAVY FOR ME!
JUST BECAUSE YOU MADE IT BACK DOESN'T MAKE YOU RESPONSIBLE!
IT WAS A KAMIKAKUSHI
I CAN'T HELP IT! I MEAN, I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THIS GHOST WORLD IS SO INTERESTING THAT HIS MAJESTY WOULD RISK HIS LIFE JUST TO SEE INTO IT!
ARE YOU STILL ON THAT?



Continued in Volume 2

This is the same Mutsuki that submitted a rough character design showing Ryoko with canines, and was warned by my boss, "You can't just add fangs wherever you please!"

Then again, you're talking about the same Mutsuki who started out as an illustrator, stormed the gates at Dengeki Paperbacks on an illustration sales pitch, ended up with a manga deal and is now releasing a comic book. Wait, what just happened?

I'm also the one who was given a copy of the *Missing* novel by my big brother. Obviously, fate was at work here. Perhaps even our fates—mine and those belonging to you who are buying this manga—are intertwined somehow as well. And if you're just borrowing this comic from a friend, please go out and pick up a copy for yourself. (I'm begging, on my knees.)

And remember, if you put all the comic books together side-by-side, the covers connect and create one large, landscaped image. So please, buy them all at once. Please (once again on my knees)!!

I am truly hoping to be able to release the next volume soon...maybe. Yup, soon. Also, I'd love to hear what you think of my work, so please drop me a line. And on that note, after an insanely rambling afterword with absolutely no punch line, "I hope to see you again in Volume 2 . I mean, see you again in Volume 2!"

Humbly,
Rei Mutsuki

Afterword

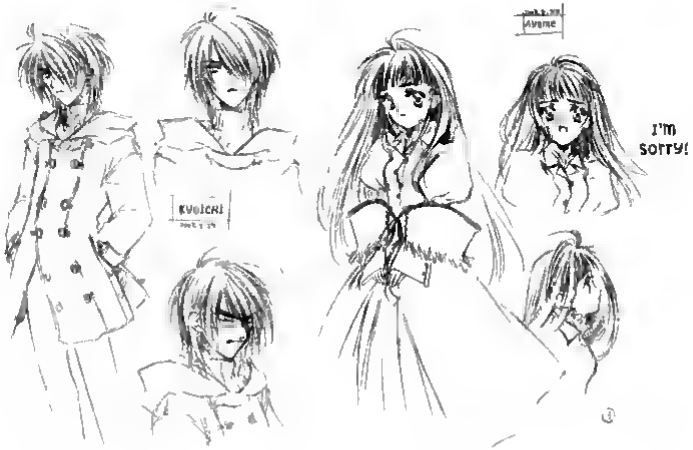
...Wow. It's being released. It's finally being released.

Wow, this is great. But I really can't believe it. What if I'm actually just on some hidden camera show? What if it's all just some April Fool's joke...?

Whenever I go to a meeting with my editor, I can't help thinking things like that. Once I started on the cover illustration though, I could finally begin to accept that this was really happening.

Quite a bit happened between then and now, but I'm just so happy that it's finally coming out safe and sound. Please allow me to be the first to thank you, the fans of the *Missing* series. Coda-san, the author who not only so pleasantly welcomed this manga version, but was also very helpful and attentive in so many ways, my editor Mine-san, who banged on the great gates of Media Works and picked me up, to everyone that I inconvenienced so many times during the course of the comic creation process, Wada-san, an editor as well, all the designers and sales people, everyone at the printers and everyone that took such great care of me—thank you. I am so very sorry for all the delays in production I may have caused with my dawdling manner..

Forgive me for this late introduction. My name is Rei Mutsuki, and I am in charge of the manga version of *Missing*.



By the time this comic book comes out, the original series should have been concluded in the thirteenth novel.

If any of the following keywords—magic, curses, legends, folklore, ghost stories, urban legends, schools, witches or madness—"stir" a little something in you, then please do try out the original novel version of *Missing* as well. And perhaps then you might gain a little insight into this world of mine—a beautiful, beloved nightmare.

"Let me spin you a tale,
As melancholy as a nightmare,
As crazed as the cherry blossoms,
As precise as a clock."

I wonder if perhaps these words from the first volume of my novels—if this goal which I sought to fulfill—was achieved far better than I ever would or could in this comic...

And with that, allow me to once again extend my deepest thanks to those reading this. I hope and pray that we will one day meet again, but until then, please continue to support this comic.

Gakuto Coda, May 5th, 2005.

Regarding the Comic Version

Hello everyone, my name is Gakuto Coda, and I am the writer of the original novel version of *Missing* upon which this comic is based.

First off, please allow me to thank everyone who picked up this book.

And to those who had a hand in making this comic book version possible—in particular one Rei Mutsuki who not only serialized the original comic, but also worked so hard in the publishing process for this book—my many, many heartfelt thanks.

My kindest regards to those of you who were familiar with the novel and tried out the comic, and also to those of you who were unfamiliar with the novel but purchased the comic anyway. And to all of you that love the Horror Fantasy genre, I hereby dedicate this book (without Mutsuki-san's permission) to you all.

Now then.

This work is the comic version of my debut novel, *Missing: Kamikakushi no Monogatari (Missing. A Kamikakushi Tale)*, published by Dengeki Paperbacks. When I was first approached for my thoughts on the manga, I simply said, "Novels and comics are done differently, so please, draw it however you wish," but Mutsuki-san worked so hard and was so intent on keeping the "feel" of the novels that I can safely say that the comic is highly faithful to the original work. That's right, wholly faithful.

So much so, in fact, that I actually wince with a tinge of embarrassment when I see—when I can actually bear to see—my "debut" in comic form, and am forced to reminisce how green, how inexperienced and how young I was back then!

But because of that faithfulness, I believe—if I may take that liberty—that the fans of the original work will be quite satisfied with the comic. And for those who are not familiar with the original novel, I believe that they will be drawn to it.

Even though the tale itself is a complete reflection of my interest in the Horror Fantasy genre, and is more a hobby to me than work, I am truly thankful and blessed that it became popular enough to have evolved into an entire series.

In the Next

MISSING
KAMIKAKUSHI NO MONOGATARI

In the next volume of *Missing: Kamikakushi no Monogatari*, Takemi Kondou and Toshiya Murakami's investigation into the dieappearance of their beloved Kyoichi leade them deeper down the path into things beyond normal human experience. A fellow student directs them to a eoul-chilling magician, who provides a valuable clue to the nature of myeterious Ayame and a useful charm for finding her. Meanwhile, Ryoko Kueakabe and Aki Kidono eeek their own answers, starting with an exorcist.

scent of withered grass from her hair. The scent fascinated him, intoxicated him.

Her eyes were open now, and she gazed up at his face in bewilderment.

"I was waiting for you," he murmured.

She lowered her eyes. "I'm sorry," she said, her voice tearful. "I'm sorry . . ." It was not rejection. It was an apology.

Utsume said nothing. The wind swept around them. It whipped the girl's hair roughly, spreading the unseasonable scent of autumn. The long tendrils lashed at Utsume's face, and then caressed it in turns. Around them, the world returned to normal. The students, momentarily dumfounded, tore their eyes from the couple that had intruded into their day and went on about their business. Perhaps they would speak about the oddness of it, perhaps not. No matter how mysterious or significant the event, there were classes to attend, a basketball game to play, life to live.

It was an inexplicable occurrence—nothing more.

The following is a preview of the novel series.
Please flip ahead six pages, and be sure to read left-to-right.

MISSING

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her by are equally illusory. Perhaps they would not have collided—she and the boy—but simply passed through one another.

A gust of wind blew past, bringing the girl's scent to Utsume. He caught it, faintly, but surely. the scent of unnatural autumn—he was sure of it—withered grass, and dry rust . . . the smell that had drawn him here.

In that instant, Utsume understood. He knew where the girl had come from, who she was, her true nature—in that instant, he understood everything about her. Understood it and accepted it.

He walked directly over to her, and stood in front of her.

She stopped dancing, her face registering a surprise far deeper than that of a girl suddenly approached by a strange boy. She *saw* him, looked up at him. Her expression went from surprise to puzzlement. "You can . . . *see* me?"

"Yes."

"Oh . . ." She put her hands to her mouth, her eyes going wide.

Utsume was aware of students continuing to pass them by, all unaware. Classes had changed and the little plaza was filling with ever more rushing bodies. But no one paused to eavesdrop on the strange conversation. No one even looked at them.

They stared at each other for some time, then Utsume took a step closer to the girl.

She raised her hand. "Don't," she whispered.

"Why not?"

"Don't come near me. If you are with me, you'll become like me. You won't be able to return," she said feebly. Her smile was unutterably sad and weary. Far too weary for a girl who looked only about fourteen or fifteen

Utsume remained motionless.

"Please," she said. "Forget you saw me. I . . . I can't explain—"

"I know," Utsume said, interrupting her

"What?"

"I know what you are."

She shook her head in obvious confusion.

He gazed directly into her eyes. "And knowing what you are, I ask . . will you come with me?"

She gazed up at him, stunned. "Come with you?" she repeated.

"I accept your isolation, your nature, all influences you may have on me. I know very well what it means to walk with you." Utsume held out his hand to her. "Come with me."

"No," she said, backing away. "No, you *don't* know. You *couldn't* know what I am. You don't know what will happen to you." She shook her head. "I'm a monster . . ."

Utsume grasped her shoulders. "Even so . . . I want you."

She shuddered, then her body went limp. Utsume gathered her against him, holding her in a firm embrace.

The air around them seemed to shiver and the atmosphere in the plaza changed The basketball bounced across the pavement, but no one tried to catch it. The boys had abandoned their game, staring at the spot where the girl in the red cape had appeared suddenly in Utsume's arms. A few others in the teeming crowd had seen as well. They too stopped to stare, astounded, or altered their course to cut a wide swathe around the couple

Utsume felt the shift—felt the two of them glide back into synch with the normal world. It was like waking from a dream, but he had brought a piece of the dream back with him, pressed against his heart.

Supporting the girl's listless frame, Utsume caught the

Anyone who experienced something like that knew the feeling. It happened all the time. just going about daily life one caught a familiar scent and paused, wrapped in a sudden, vivid memory and wondering what had triggered it.

That was it exactly. But this remembered scent created a mood far more gloomy than even Utsume's childhood memories.

The scent beckoned to him, tugged at him. He turned his nose to the wind. The source was upwind, and the dry aroma was so mixed with the perfume of the cherry blossoms that they almost overwhelmed it.

Utsume stood up, turning his slim, black-clad frame into the wind.

He began to follow the scent, bent to it like a hound. He followed it through a grove of cherry trees; a paved clearing spread out before him—a small plaza between buildings. And there, in the center of the plaza behind the club building . . .

There stood a girl.

Now the petals scatter,
Let us play between the breeze
See a girl's dream in the flowers,
Slip between the wind.
A creature dances, dressed in the wind,
Which carries the scent of people.
It sings, wearing shackles that no human can touch
Playing in the scent of flowers,
Longing for the scent of humans,
The wind maiden sings,
Of sadness beyond human understanding.

She sang these words, her voice clear and translucent, while the wind wrapped itself about her, tossing her hair, rippling her long skirts and her red cape. She would have made an impossibly beautiful painting.

Her song felt very old to Utsume. It was more than a song; it was a chant; it was a spell. A song of the soul, expressing everything this girl felt.

Utsume noted irrelevantly that the song lacked a certain polish. The girl was improvising the words and rhythm. Her voice had resonance, yet it was strangely fragile, melting into the air like candied floss on the tongue. The wind danced around her, as if called by the loneliness in her song. It carried her scent, strewed flowers at her feet, and cleared a stage for her, setting her at its center as if everything else existed for her benefit. The stage was hers alone as she stood and sang her haunting melody.

Utsume's eyes narrowed in puzzlement. The plaza between the club building and the new school building across from it was, as usual, filled with students, coming and going. The bulletin board in front of the new building, the several benches placed around it, the pleasant presence of the cherry trees, were enough to make it a popular spot to hang out. At a glance, there were at least ten people using the benches—reading, talking, or just sitting. A basketball hoop had been affixed to the eaves of the club building. Beneath it a group of boys played a game of half court.

Not one of these people was looking at the girl. It was as if she wasn't there, or as if none of them could see her. Nor was she paying any attention to them. Even when one of the ball players brushed right past her to chase a loose ball, she ignored him, as he ignored her. They were mere inches from collision, but neither one seemed to be aware of the other.

If she is an illusion, Utsume thought, *then the students passing*

MISSING

Gakuto Coda

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Prologue: Beneath the Cherry Grove in Full Bloom

Was their meeting coincidence or fate?

Is there really that much difference between the two?

A faint scent drifted on the breeze, carried through the school grounds past the swaying branches of sentinel trees. When he caught that scent, it brought such a strong sense of deja vu that Kyoichi Utsume, who had been lying on a shaded bench, sat up abruptly.

It was a scent from long ago, wildly out of place amid the cherry blossoms dancing on the spring breeze. If it wasn't his imagination, then it was a memory. And it did not belong in this school or in this season.

Utsume knew that the sense of smell was far more important than most people realized. The scent of moist earth and vegetation after a rain brought back memories of the garden at his grandfather's house where he played as a toddler.

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MISSING™

KAMIKAKUSHI NO MONOGATARI

Kyoichi Utsume, a.k.a. "His Majesty, Lord of Darkness," is a dark and compelling mystery—so much so that his fellow Literature Club members would rather discuss him than books! When "His Majesty" vanishes in front of their very eyes, his friends are left with several unanswered questions: what is the source of Kyoichi's long-standing obsession with the "other side"? And just who is Ayame—the eerily ghostlike girl Kyoichi brought to school as his girlfriend the day before he disappeared?

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